

Univerzita Karlova

Filozofická fakulta

Obecná teorie a dějiny umění a kultury, Filmová studia

Diplomová práce

Bc. Noemi Purkrábková

Material Fictions: Moving (between) Images of Contemporary Art

Hmotné fikce: Pohyb mezi obrazy současného umění

Praha 2021

Vedoucí práce: doc. PhDr. Kateřina Svatoňová, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor Kateřina Svatoňová for her valuable advice and comments, consistent willingness to make time to read parts of the text even under time pressure or in unfitting conditions, and last but not least for her affirming attitude and encouragements. I also wish to express my many thanks to Andrew Wilson, (by far not only) for immense help with correcting my grammar mistakes and for patience in dealing with my occasional willful experiments with the English language. My thanks goes also to Jiří Sirůček for engaging in the process of helping one another out, and sharing information and struggles. Lastly, I am thankful to those artists who provided me with additional information, as well as to all others for doing work that made this thesis possible in the first place, and to everyone else who gave me any sort of advice, who was helpful, or who simply remained close and caring.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze, dne 18. srpna 2021

Noemi Purkrábková

Abstract

This master's thesis engages moving images of contemporary art in order to sketch out certain ontological qualities of the digital image and imaginary, as they increasingly spill out of all fixed frames and fill the spaces between screens, contexts, and human and non-human agents. Following Steven Shaviro's observation that digital media brought about a completely "new regime" of mutable technical imaging often independent of any preceding "real" space, but instead able to produce its own space-time, this text treats moving images as performative world-shaping fictions with tangible traction on reality. Instead of understanding their growing proliferation in terms of the often-mourned disappeared correspondence to some previous reality, depth or truth, it suggests taking their fluidity as an opportunity to rethink the very divide placed between reality and fiction, as it continues to blur throughout our interactions with digital media, and to treat images not as mere representations but as material forces intensively active in the physical matter of the world, as well as in our own cognition. To articulate this irreducible materiality of digital image-fictions, the thesis weaves together on one hand respective philosophical concepts of François Laruelle and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – seeking to reshape the very relationship between image, fiction and the "real" world – and on the other hand, the understanding of technical (digital) objects not as mere tools but as beings who co-evolve with humans in a transductive process of mutual ontogenesis, as theorized in the interlinked thinking of Gilbert Simondon, Yuk Hui and Bernard Stiegler. By approaching digital images through the concept of the digital object, the text underlines their often invisible but heavily material existence, which grows in importance as they become increasingly autonomous and operational, and treats fictions of digital moving images of contemporary art not as individual artworks, but as constituting a much needed experimental grey zone of intense encounter between human and machine fictioning.

Keywords

fiction, digital image, digital media, moving image art, contemporary art, operational images, ontogenesis, fluid ontology, digital object, technical object, artificial intelligence, feeling

Abstrakt

Tato magisterská diplomová práce vstupuje do toku pohyblivých obrazů současného umění s cílem nastínit některé obecnější ontologické kvality digitální vizuality a imaginace, jež stále výrazněji uniká ze všech pevných rám(c)ů a rozlévá se do prostoru mezi obrazovkami, kontexty a lidskými i nelidskými aktéry. V návaznosti na postřeh Stevena Shavira, že digitální média přinesla zcela nový režim tvárného technického obrazu, který již nutně nezávisí na žádném předcházejícím „reálném“ prostoru, ale spíše produkuje svůj vlastní prostoročas, chápe tento text pohyblivé obrazy jako performativní světo-tvorné fikce s hmatatelným dopadem na skutečnost. Místo častého oplakávání ztracené vazby na jakoukoli předchozí realitu, hloubku či pravdu, vnímá přítomná práce bujení obrazů jako příležitost k přehodnocení samotné dělící čáry mezi realitou a fikcí, jež se nepřestává rozpíjet v našich interakcích s digitálními médii. A také přistoupit k obrazům nikoli jako k pouhým reprezentacím, ale jako k materiálním silám aktivně působícím jak na fyzickou hmotu světa, tak na naše vlastní kognitivní procesy. Aby popsal tuto neredukovatelnou materialitu digitálních obrazů-fikcí, propojuje text na jedné straně Françoise Laruela s Gillesem Deleuzem a Félixem Guattarim – jejichž vybrané filozofické koncepty jí pomáhají redefinovat vztah mezi obrazem, fikcí a „skutečným“ světem – a na straně druhé pojetí technických (digitálních) objektů nikoli jako pouhých nástrojů, nýbrž bytostí, jež se vyvíjejí spolu s člověkem ve vzájemném procesu oboustranné ontogeneze, jak je chápou Gilbert Simondon, Yuk Hui a Bernard Stiegler. Práce nahlíží digitální obrazy skrze koncept digitálního objektu, aby zdůraznila jejich mnohdy neviditelnou, ale těžce materiální existenci, jejíž rozpoznání nabývá na důležitosti spolu s tím, jak se obrazy stávají stále více autonomními a operativními. Přistupuje tak i k digitálním pohyblivým obrazům současného umění ne jako k jednotlivým uměleckým dílům, ale jako k velmi potřebné experimentální šedé zóně, v níž se na poli fikce uskutečňují intenzivní setkání mezi lidskou a strojovou imaginací.

Klíčová slova

fikce, digitální obraz, digitální média, umění pohyblivého obrazu, současné umění, operativní obrazy, ontogeneze, fluidní ontologie, digitální objekt, technický objekt, umělá inteligence, cítění

INTRODUCTION	7
1. FLUID ONTOLOGY	9
1.1. “Nothing is Real, Everything is Permitted”	9
1.2. A New Media Regime	14
1.3. Everything Flows: Ontology for the World in Flux	18
1.4. “Just Because It’s Fake Doesn’t Mean I Don’t Feel It:” Methodology between the “Posts”	24
1.4.1. The Post- and the Pre-	24
1.4.2. Putting Head Under the Water	27
1.4.3. Moving (between) Images of Contemporary Art	30
2. PRODUCTIVE POETICS OF FICTION	33
2.1. The Darkening of Thought	33
2.2. Everything is Black: Theorizing in the Dark	36
2.3. From the Mirror to the Sea	42
2.4. Everything is Real: Irreducible Materiality of Thought	46
2.5. Tool-kits for Dabbling in The Dark: Moving between Philosophy, Art And Science	49
2.6. Transformative Poetics of Fiction	53
3. CREATIVITY OF DIGITAL OBJECTS	57
3.1. On the (Onto)genesis of Digital Technical Objects	58
3.1.1. In Search of the Digital Object	58
3.1.1.1. Defining the Technical Object	58
3.1.1.2. Defining the Digital Object	62
3.1.3. “What Invents Who:” The Organs of Cognition	66
3.1.3. Mutual Ontogenesis	69
3.2. Digital Objects in Contemporary Moving Image Art	72
3.2.1. Liquid Opacity of Digital Fiction	74
3.2.2. Night Vision: Seeing (in) the Invisible World	78
3.2.3. Phantoms in the Shadows: The Hidden Lives of Digital Beings	82
3.2.4. Merging into a World Made of Images	85
3.2.5. Entangled Fictions: Stories in Between	87
3.3. Fictioning (with) Machines	90
3.3.1. Magic Cuts	90
3.3.2. Rendering Fictions	94
3.3.3. Mythotechnesis: Operational Images and Generative Machine Fictioning	99
4. NEW WEAPONS	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113
REFERENCED ARTWORKS / EXHIBITIONS	122
APPENDIX	124

Introduction

Because the first chapter of this text plays itself the role of an introduction, in terms of establishing certain necessary contexts and explaining the aims of the thesis, I will keep the formal introduction short.

I would first like to address why I chose to write the text in English. As much as I am aware of the importance of developing new Czech vocabulary capable of (cor)responding to the fast-evolving world, the task of translating a completely English-based discourse of both the latest digital technologies and contemporary art, in a way which would not create contrasting disruptions in the text and which would allow me to connect the words and concepts in the way I wanted, seemed presently unattainable. Moreover, writing in Czech about images of contemporary art, which are usually more influenced by, created in and disseminated through the global internet-grown community, than shaped by any respective local or national context, simply did not feel appropriate. On top of that, this text largely works with theoretical background which has in most part never been translated to Czech, many of the ideas containing entire strings of new vocabulary and neologisms whose proper translation would demand the work of one far more specialized in the respective approaches, which this thesis alludes to just in passing. How I hope to possibly atone for betraying situated knowledge and a responsibility toward local academic discourse, is by bringing in some select works of the Czech artists most apt for the themes intimated in this text.

Being relieved to have avoided translating François Laruelle to Czech, I must also remark that it is in itself a precarious decision to partly incorporate his thinking into something as formal as a thesis. This text thus dares to place some of his concepts (albeit accessed primarily through more condensed secondary literature) alongside other thinkers he himself would probably not associate his thought or overall project with (if indeed there is anything in the formal world of philosophy he would find himself akin to in the first place). But it could be said to allow itself this possible contradiction in the same manner in which Laruelle is contradictory and expressly defers contradiction – refusing all philosophy while at the same time claiming no philosophies are opposed. Moreover, this whole thesis in fact intentionally follows his deeper logic of not pinning concepts *against* each other, but bringing them *in*. The same can be said about the very idea of “non-philosophy,” which this text doesn’t at all claim either as its method nor hopes to fulfill its mandate, but which influences and brings certain poetic or sensual qualities to many of the other thoughts outlined.

Finally, as much as the bulk of the ideas underpinning this thesis were formulated gradually over time, the moment I embarked on actively writing was the point at which most of the public spaces in Czech Republic started to re-open after a tough lockdown. In my personal prolonged quarantine, I often reflected on how, in the last year and a half of COVID-19 reality, when most of the exhibitions were closed and crossing borders was often hard or impossible, the flat screens became the only place where we could encounter not only artworks but even whole art shows – some of them inventing new formats or happening literally only in order to be posted online. This is one of the reasons why this thesis does not mention virtual reality. Not because it would be unimportant (I wouldn't have written most of my bachelor thesis about it if I thought it was), but because this text focuses on the materiality of exactly those images that we otherwise see as “flat.”

But these flat screens recently became unprecedented, vital nodes of connection not only with texts, information, or art, but with other human beings as well – turning humans into images and animations. We could thus say that all of us have, to a certain extent, become at least partially more digital. This text is not intended to judge this development, nor does it want to celebrate any shift into some techno-utopian direction. We have all felt that physical and digital existence are not at all fully exchangeable. But we have also felt how the digital influences our physical body, perception, attention and cognition. The platforms we have been using have corporate owners with their own financial interests. One of the motivations for this text was the need to realize that we must nurture our attitudes toward technical beings outside of these interests and try “searching for a new structure of care”¹ between both human and non-human agents. But to be able to do that, we first need to acknowledge the force of images we encounter and reconsider our own role within their sticky webs.

¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2016, p. 248.

1. FLUID ONTOLOGY

1.1. “Nothing is Real, Everything is Permitted”

*Synthetic realities inhabit almost every sphere of the global social spectrum,
yet humans continue to call them fictions.*

– Delphi Carstens, Mer Roberts, Things that Knowledge Cannot Eat

Guns, masks, military camouflage, furry cloaks, a horned head covered in hide, a ferret snout falling over crazed eyes, several spires cutting through dense air, a wooden staff, a police riot shield... The swarming mob climbs up the high walls, rushing across the Oscar-red carpet, seizing memorial objects, busts and sculptures standing on both sides of the corridor adorned with famous canvases. The main chamber falls into chaos as the gatecrashers break in, taking over desks and seats. Someone picks up a lectern, carrying it quickly away. The sound of shattered glass resonates through the room, echoing back and forth between the relief portraits of famous lawgivers engraved in the walls, their regal faces looking down at plastic bags shielding the heads of congress(women) from the tear gas swirling heavily on the floor...

These lines refer neither to a remixed, centuries old battle report, nor a trailer sequence from the last contribution to the now much-favored genre of catastrophic film (in this case, featuring special Viking time-out-of-joint elements). It is a description of an actual event which, quite symptomatically, opened the very year in which this thesis is being written: On Wednesday the 6th of January 2021, slightly after lunch, a posse of (now former) President Trump supporters stormed one of the most iconic buildings of the United States – the Capitol. Congress was just about to certify the presidential election results, when part of the raging rally stormed the building – resembling by acts and costumes more of a peculiar LARP² group’s battle reenactment than a political demonstration – a scene that could very well have come from the pen of the Game of Thrones author George R. R. Martin, if he spiced up the medieval and fairytale inspirational sources with a touch of contemporary apocalyptic imagery.

² Live Action Role Playing (LARP) is a form of RPG where the participants physically portray the characters to pursue goals within a fictional setting represented by real world environments.

This is not a mere personal impression of the writer of this thesis, but something widely articulated by TV reporters and journalists covering this ultra-mediated event,³ many of whom have referred to the images and videos appearing in all major media as well as in personal tweets and Instagram posts as looking like a moment out of a Hollywood blockbuster. Whereas some mentioned that “it *felt like* an American action movie,”⁴ BBC went so far as to compare the riot to “a zombie movie”⁵ and Vox even directly commented on the strongly fiction-like atmosphere of the whole event, stating that the insurrectionists gave everybody “*the feeling* they all thought they were in a movie,” which they “wrote, directed, and starred in [...], scaling walls, bellowing from podiums, mugging for their buddies’ glamour shots.”⁶

But the scene of the storming of the Capitol is but one manifestation of a broader all-permeating *feeling* of a strongly fictionalized and mediated reality from which we cannot step out – a single drop in the stormy sea of performative (and sometimes also performed) fictions proliferating in form of static or moving images across the screens: the flaming arrows, DIY catapults, hair-knitted face masks and giant slingshots that shocked the (online) world last year during the Hong Kong protests. The American National Security Agency releases an official document advocating for the need to further research the so called “Unidentified Aerial Phenomena”⁷ – or colloquially, the UFOs. And while theorists such as Steven Shaviro, Suhail Malik or Armen Avanessian have been continuously underlining the fictitious nature of the whole contemporary global economy,⁸ highly built on volatile financial speculation

³ By using „ultra-mediated” we would like to avoid connotations with the concept of “hypermediation” articulated by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. (Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press 1999). However useful the concept is for describing specific relations between the means of particular media, it doesn’t serve us well in trying to express the fluidity and elusiveness with which fictions and facts move across screens, influencing us oftentimes exactly by their seamless transformation.

⁴ WION, Gravitas: The storming of Capitol Hill. WION news Youtube channel. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeLfSuc6ytU&ab_channel=WION> [uploaded 7. 1. 2021, accessed 8. 6. 2021]

⁵ BBC, US Capitol riot: 'It was like a zombie movie'. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-55581269>> [uploaded 8.1.2021, accessed 8. 6. 2021].

⁶ Alissa Wilkinson: The chaos at the Capitol wasn’t a movie, *Vox*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.vox.com/culture/22218583/trump-movie-hollywood-capitol-insurrection-biden-hawley>> [published 7. 1. 2021, accessed 7. 5. 2021].

⁷ Office Of The Director Of National Intelligence: Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Preliminary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf>> [published 25. 6. 2021, accessed 30. 6. 2021]

⁸ See for example: Suhail Malik, The Ontology of Finance: Price, Power, and the Arkhéderivative, In: Robin MacKay (ed.): *Collapse Vol. VIII: Casino Real*. Falmouth: Urbanomic, pp. 629-811; Steven Shaviro: Unpredicting the Future. *Alienocene*. Dostupný na WWW: <<https://alienocene.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/unpredicting-to-print.pdf>> [published 31. 3. 2018; accessed 10. 3. 2021].

with “futures” and derivative contracts,⁹ this year the art world nervously buzzed with fiery discussions about the quick rise of “NFTs” (non-fungible tokens), through which crypto currencies and digital ownership fully entered even traditional auction houses like Christie’s...¹⁰

But the “digital” reality itself also seems to be evolving with accelerating velocity, updating every second while at the same time becoming more and more accessible. From diverse forms of “deep fakes” using machine learning to produce fictional moving images of actual people’s acts,¹¹ to extreme steps regarding the possibilities of creating fully digitally generated characters, as demonstrated for example in *MetaHuman Creator* by Unreal Engine, promising “high-fidelity digital humans in minutes” without need of an extraordinarily strong computer, as the rendering itself happens somewhere else; that is, on the cloud.¹² The extent of these possibilities is also apparent in the constant betterment and growing credibility of digitally produced objects, landscapes or even AI generated speech¹³ that are making digital creations harder and harder to distinguish from “real” images; but such images oftentimes don’t even precede them, or do so only in the form of one of many marginal inputs in the complex machine learning process. While scrolling down the feed, pictures of our friends’ lives naturally merge with fictional 3D-sculpted Instagram influencers looking good (and very real and very happy) in the newest model of luxury brand shoes or expensive underwear, posing in selfies with friends (**figure 1**), writing emotional captions about their lives and simply “living their dream” – if they don’t have one of these rare bad days when they post about crying on the toilet (**figure 2**).¹⁴

Today, maybe more than ever, it is obvious that fiction does not belong to the realm of the “unreal” (if it indeed ever did) but grows around, from and into the myths that constitute what we make sense of as “reality.” As such, it is not opposed to any (pre-)given truth, but

⁹ As Investopedia explains: “Futures are derivative financial contracts that obligate the parties to transact an asset at a predetermined future date and price. The buyer must purchase or the seller must sell the underlying asset at the set price, regardless of the current market price at the expiration date.” Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/futures.asp>> [publication date unknown, updated 9. 9. 2021, accessed 3. 5. 2021]

¹⁰ By Jacob Kastrenakes: Beeple sold an NFT for \$69 million. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.theverge.com/2021/3/11/22325054/beeple-christies-nft-sale-cost-everydays-69-million>> [published 11. 3. 2021, accessed 12. 6. 2021]

¹¹ It’s Getting Harder to Spot a Deep Fake Video, Bloomberg Quicktake Youtube channel. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLoI9hAX9dw&ab_channel=BloombergQuicktake> [uploaded

¹² MetaHuman Creator web page. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.unrealengine.com/en-US/digital-humans>>

¹³ See for example the *15 AI* project.

¹⁴ See mor for example at the profile of “lilmiquela, 19-year-old Robot living in LA.” Accesible at WWW: <<https://www.instagram.com/lilmiquela/>>

directly “productive of [it]”¹⁵ – “[s]cience fiction and science fact cohabit happily in this tale.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the many fictions co-created and disseminated through digital media, function as (ever more accessible) tools for (oftentimes very selfish) reshaping of the world that feels ever more pliant and formless, escaping attempts to grasp it, name it or think it.

The medieval/science-fiction clothing worn by some of the key “protagonists” of the “story” of the Capitol storming which was unfolding on and after 6th January across various TV sets, computer screen, YouTube windows, Instagram stories, Tweets, and also Twitch videos or Discord threads, thus can be said to nicely express something important about the everyday world we live in. For it is a world of fast-evolving, ever-changing and relatively recent data-fueled, multi-directional, global, digital exchange in which the line that was once potentially drawable between the real and the fictional is being radically and indisputably washed away. The disappearance of this boundary is of course nothing new, being among others famously proclaimed a mere “optical illusion”¹⁷ by Donna Haraway already in the 1980s and the proximity and entanglement of fact and fiction – as well as their theoretical embodiments – only continued to grow throughout the 1990s interest in theory-fiction, only to re-appear later at the center of attention with the rise of speculative tendencies in both philosophy and art.¹⁸ Also French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, to whom this text is heavily indebted, observes, going back all the way to Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s concept of cultural industry, that with the advent of mechanically reproduced images, it becomes progressively harder to “distinguish between perception and imagination, reality and fiction.”¹⁹

But it is of high importance to emphasize at the very beginning of this text, that this hardly fully refutable observation about a certain shift in the way we perceive and make sense of what is “real” and what is (un)easily frameable as fiction, doesn’t serve this thesis as any reason for nostalgia, apathy, or doomsday rhetoric. Instead of enclosing itself in the worn-out endless mourning of the “loss of the real,” articulated most famously by Jean Baudrillard,²⁰ it

¹⁵ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning, The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2019, p. 5.

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, London/Durham: Duke University Press 2016, p. 7.

¹⁷ Donna Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York, New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 149.

¹⁸ In philosophy, we of course mean the whole speculative turn expressed most famously by “speculative realism.” In art we can mention the important and influential triptych of exhibitions *Speculation on Anonymous Materials* (2013-2014), *Nature After Nature* (2014) and *Inhuman* (2015) curated by Susanne Pfeffer in Friedericianum in Kassel.

¹⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011, p. 38.

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1994.

wishes to underline the entanglement of fiction and fact in their medially and technically specific inseparability and understand it as a (potentially positive) productive force.

Media and film theorist Steven Shaviro similarly notes, that “the very opposition between reality-based and image-based modes of presentation breaks down in the contemporary world of electronic media and global capital,”²¹ and that today, “the most vivid and intense reality is precisely the reality of images.”²² This text is based upon the belief that technical digital images and the fictions/realities they (help to) produce are not generative of a simply washed-out reality of pure surfaceness, as was and sometimes still is very often claimed, but that digital objects have lives, are part of (evolutionary) processes, and thrive with “intensities”²³ that are materially productive of the very world we share with them. Dismissing them as “fake” or “fiction” is therefore not only oversimplifying and backward-thinking, as it discloses binary logic which prevents us from grasping or making use of the extreme mutability of our surroundings, but – as will be shown later on – an actual mental and physical threat for the future of human species as such (however questionable and question-worth is, whether or not it deserves to be “saved” in the first place).²⁴

The aim of this opening chapter therefore is to briefly pick up and connect several strings, at a specific point and from a specific angle, which run through the context this thesis is stepping into, sometimes without ambitions to discuss them in detail or to develop them fully (for logical limitations of space, as well as to stay focused on the knot being tightened up). What will hopefully emerge is a sketch of what we might call an ontological framework, which could allow us to grasp and ground certain qualities of structure, velocity, temporality, and materiality at play in an entangled, digitally-mediated world, where causality doesn’t flow unidirectionally, and where many borders – be it between reality and fiction, object and its representation, or distinct categories of space and time – continue to (re)dissolve. Following lines will thus situate this thesis in terms of contextual standpoints, as the format desires, as well as explain its view of and approach to moving image art appearing along the way. Last but not least, it also hopes to affect a certain atmosphere, a set of textures and feelings for the lines to come after.

²¹ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: Zero Books 2009, p. 38.

²² Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 38.

²³ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987, p. 4.

²⁴ Some scholars, such as Patricia MacCormack, nowadays argue, following of course Jean François Lyotard but also some of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s observations, that not only living with the truth of extinction (as many speculative philosophers suggest), but also literally going extinct is the only way to actually save the world. Patricia MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*. Farnham: Ashgate 2012.

1.2. A New Media Regime

[M]oving images, like water, always find a way to spread.

– Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger and Alena Strohmaier,
The State of Post-Cinema. Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination

There is one more important layer to the scene of the Capitol storming – the ways it was mediated, which is simultaneously a reason for it unfolding in the particular form it did. As journalist Michelle Lhooq, who on her blog jokingly but pointedly analyzed the most eye-catching costumes “on the set,” remarked on account of not only this but any other highly saturated societal act nowadays in general: “Cataclysmic news events unfold like data tsunamis, with the real action happening in a memer-commentariat metaverse far far away from the Boomer traditional news chatter.”²⁵ What she sweepingly summarizes here is the way in which the media sphere is being increasingly shaped out of sight and reach of traditional information channels, happening through the dissemination of (not only but largely) images beyond individual control. In this sense, “traditional” means not only printed press or television, but also official news websites and even their Facebook or Twitter accounts. The narratives (once perhaps identifiable as either real or made-up) constituting the contemporary world are being increasingly produced and spread by both human and non-human individuals, groups, and trolls; swelling unevenly in often unexpected corners of social media bubbles and transversally shifting across different scopes, amplified by unpredictable (and manipulatable – a quality often taken advantage of) ever-changing power grids of algorithms. And, as Lhooq implies, it was first and foremost these networks the action costumes shone for.

Already more than ten years ago, Shaviro claimed in his book *Post-Cinematic Affect*, that digitalization generated ongoing changes “massive enough” for us to confidently pronounce that, “we are now witnessing the emergence of a different media regime, and indeed of a different mode of production, than those which dominated the twentieth century.”²⁶ This condition of “post-cinema” was itself of course largely theorized from the

²⁵ Michelle Lhooq, DC WAS MAGA BURNING MAN. Accessible at WWW:

<<https://ravennewworld.substack.com/p/dc-was-maga-burning-man>> [published 8. 1. 2021, accessed 10. 1. 2021].

²⁶ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: Zero Books 2009, p. 2.

specific perspective of film studies,²⁷ but our aim here is not to trace what happened to any formerly stable “cinematic” image, as much as to understand the digital moving images of contemporary art in their media complexity, growing often out of something completely different than any previous experience or context of the medium of classical film.

Shaviro further adds that digital technologies have in fact given birth to altogether novel “ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience” itself.²⁸ Similar observation was made also by artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, who in her symptomatically named text *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?*, writes that today’s (digital) images “acquired an uncanny ability to proliferate, transform, and activate,” allowing them to walk “through screens, right into reality,” pouring out into the “off-screen space.”²⁹ We will analyze this unsettled and unsettling life of images in more detail in following chapters, what is important to note now is that this free-floating agency of digital images makes it in fact impossible to “understand reality without understanding cinema, photography, 3-D modeling, animation, or other forms of moving or still image.”³⁰

Consequently, images not only cannot be left out, but they also cannot be reduced to mere “tracings,”³¹ bearing an indexical imprint of the pre-existing reality (which so many did and some still do mourn in the reference to moving image’s historical phase of analogue photography and celluloid film material)³² but they are, as Shaviro points out, directly “expressive of” and “productive” of certain pre-individual digital sensibility permeating all surfaces and filling what (in a cartesian mindset) might otherwise be taken for empty space.³³ If we pick up the mention we made of speculative finance, it can be similarly said to embody the very logic images operate through: being “not representational, but performative,”³⁴ they

²⁷ See for example: Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger, Alena Strohmaier (Eds). *The State of Post-Cinema. Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016. or Malte Hagener, *Where Is Cinema (Today)? The Cinema in the Age of Media Immanence*. in: *Cinéma & Cie*, no. 11, 2008.

²⁸ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 2.

²⁹ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?*. In: *E-flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2015, pp. 11-12.

³⁰ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 18.

³¹ In Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987, pp. 3-26.

³² We shall return to the operational rather than representation nature of digital images in the third chapter of this text.

³³ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 2.

³⁴ Steven Shaviro: *Unpredicting the Future. Alienocene*. Dostupný na WWW:

<<https://alienocene.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/unpredicting-to-print.pdf>> [published 31. 3. 2018; accessed 10. 3. 2021].

don't "measure, register, or predict future happenings in the world," but "actively *produce*[...] those happenings."³⁵

The "excessive, overgrown post-cinematic mediasphere"³⁶ is thus a space-time beyond mere representation, comprising of constant flows that cannot be reduced to their content – they are in a sense media without a message,³⁷ signifiers without attachments to any signifieds. In a recent podcast for a multi-layered online platform/community *New Models*, architect and design theorist Keller Easterling spoke of a certain self-actualizing magical function of lies in today's world, where sentences often work against or across their supposedly attached meaning.³⁸ As if the main forces driving contemporary (geo)politics seem to not even speak our language. In one aspect, it is without doubt because so many of these forces elude any human-perceptible speed or scale, as well as any stable expression of meaning. But the means of usage of language itself seem to have changed as well. The fictions, whether they are conscious lies or "innocent" fantasies (and how to tell the difference?), don't represent anything anymore. They seem to have become weaponized tools actualizing the desired reality of those who wield them, if not completely of their own.

Shaviri similarly writes, that "ubiquitous digital technologies" are organized as a "space of flows" of images no longer "tied to any indexical referents."³⁹ An ultra-mediated world produced by what Stiegler calls "hypervideo technologies,"⁴⁰ thus cannot be simply captured or "represented, in any ordinary sense."⁴¹ To illustrate this, Hito Steyerl goes back to Baudrillard's all-too-famous example of Borge's fable about the map of the empire covering the whole of its territory, reformulating that the map in fact is not equal to it (whether the reality is still hidden underneath its thin surface or if it supposedly completely vanished), but "exceeds it,"⁴² and we might add, spills itself into it while being simultaneously sucked in from the opposite direction. The consequence of global digitalization is therefore the inescapable unification of all phenomena, that "are all woven together in one and the same fabric,"⁴³ allowing "for anything to be exchanged with anything else."⁴⁴ Meaning is not gone or defrauded, it's just extremely fluid, changeable and volatile, as the "[i]mage and the world

³⁵ Steven Shaviri: *Unpredicting the Future...* Emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 67.

³⁷ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 132.

³⁸ New Models podcast, episode 36: Happy Medium (Keller Easterlink). Accessible at WWW: <
<https://soundcloud.com/newmodels/ep-36-keller-easterlink>> [publication date unknown, accessed 20. 7. 2020]

³⁹ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3... p. 2.

⁴¹ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 131.

⁴² Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 19.

⁴³ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 132.

are in many cases just versions of each other.”⁴⁵ This consequently makes digital video not a mere set of moving images, but a specific form of “articulation and composition of forces,”⁴⁶ flowing through everywhere while remaining inherently unlocalizable to a single place.

It is in this sense that Stiegler writes about “the irreducible materiality of the image,”⁴⁷ which cannot be split between the image-object and a mental image, because both are part of the same phenomenon in which “it is no longer possible to separate the signified and the signifier that in the past would have defined the two faces of the linguistic sign.”⁴⁸ This even leads him to a controversial proclamation that “[t]he image in general does not exist.”⁴⁹ That of course doesn’t mean that in a world ever-more permeated by images, the images themselves would be actually disappearing or in any way “fake”; on the contrary, they are not (anymore) separable and frameable as mere flat derivative images *of* the world. Being materially entangled in our mental but also bodily processes, they in a sense even tend to be “haptic rather than merely optical.”⁵⁰

The italics which you might have noticed gently emphasizing the nouns and verbs connected to “feeling” in the beginning of the text thus aimed to underline another string stretched across this thesis – the materially affective and visceral qualities of digital images. Because the pervasive “feeling” of unreality cannot be understood in a metaphorical sense of some semblant hallucination of the abstract(ed) mind, but as an actual force of flow exchange happening even between digital signals and human skin cells. When Shaviro thus asks at the beginning of *Post-Cinematic Affect*: “*What it feels like* to live in the early twenty-first century?,”⁵¹ it is a question directed partly at rapid changes in human perception and cognition under the constant digital mediation, but it necessarily also comes with the broader understanding and scrutiny of the multi-directional, ever-shifting flows constituting the very “sphere of liquidity”⁵² humans inhabit, but which is not limited to their movements or wishes.

⁴⁵ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World*..., p. 18.

⁴⁶ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*..., p. 17.

⁴⁷ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 36.

⁴⁸ S Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 36.

⁴⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 36. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*..., p. 38.

⁵¹ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*..., p. 2. Emphasis in the original.

⁵² Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World*..., p. 17.

1.3. Everything Flows: Ontology for the World in Flux

*Everything flows, objects are springs. [...]
The perceptual space is dense with waves. All things are transmitters, without interruption and in every direction; our senses ceaselessly receive. We are plunged into the space of communication.
We bathe in an interlacing of channels. [...] The space of signals is physical space itself.*

– Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*

“I realised quickly that she started to feel like an oil spill.”

– Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*

If we return to Steyerl’s text one more time, she seems to be observing something important not only about the quantity and movements of contemporary digital images, but also about their material qualities: “In this fluid media space, images and sounds morph across different bodies and carriers, acquiring more and more glitches and bruises along the way.”⁵³ As many others, she thus ascribes to digital media a certain “watery” texture in order to express the fast and free-floating exchanges operating in (and producing) the global world. There have been numerous attempts to conceptualize this volatility by thinking through the materiality of fluid – it is an important motif within certain works of Michel Serres concerning “fluid dynamics,” and even more famously in the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman, who even directly named present era “liquid modernity.”⁵⁴ In the end, even the aforementioned problematization of borders made by Haraway already identified the viscous drops produced by what she termed “leaky distinction[s]” between human and animal, organic and machinic, and physical and non-physical.⁵⁵ And the leaking hasn’t stopped ever since.

Connecting the water imaginary with digital technologies also seems sort of natural – both are usually comprehended as fluid, translucent and elusive. Consequently, the flows of the contemporary “open, immanent, and ever-becoming”⁵⁶ world are often also recognized as necessarily ungraspable with fixed concepts and stable hierarchies. In an attempt to ride the

⁵³ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2000.

⁵⁵ Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto...*, pp. 151–153.

⁵⁶ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking*. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, n. 33, 2015, pp. 247–264. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273895732_Wet_Ontologies_Fluid_Spaces_Giving_Depth_to_Volume_through_Oceanic_Thinking> [published 2015, accessed 26.3. 2021], p. 1. [the page numbers correspond to the online accessible document].

rising tide of constant (ex)changes, we have thus already seen number of variants of “flat ontologies,” emphasizing the interconnectedness and inseparability of networks of unsteady actors and invisible-to-the-human-eye factors and processes constituting the ever-shifting present.⁵⁷ But networks are all but flat.⁵⁸ And water is hardly ever completely transparent. In their text *Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking*, geographer Philip Steinberg and biologist Kimberley Peters challenge the often-criticized horizontalism of flat ontologies with the concept of “wet ontology,” which they claim could express the nature of constant interaction at play while at the same time demonstrate that what at first sight appears to be seamless flow is actually thick, deep and voluminous.

Their idea of “wet ontology” thus offers to help us move beyond conceptually depleted notions of space and time, which stopped (again, if they ever did) corresponding to the shifting streams of (media) landscape, showing also how the classical Euclidean view ultimately lends itself to the separation of “spaces from the matter and meanings that occur within” them.⁵⁹ The authors thus turn specifically to the ocean as the point of departure for reconsidering matter not as a “static substance” but to instead trace its flows “as it moves through, and simultaneously constructs, both space and time.”⁶⁰ It is thus a view of matter as “mutable and leaky” while at the same time expressive and constitutive of “non-linear and fluctuating” time of the contemporary in its “on-going re-formation.”⁶¹

The *feeling* of living in the 21st century Shaviri asks to name could thus, based on this idea, be perhaps best compared to being thrown into water. Because “those who actually *engage* the ocean, like sailors and, perhaps even more profoundly, surfers and swimmers, become one with the waves as the waves become one with them.”⁶² We could therefore say that, while having no separate island to watch our sinking boat from, we cannot observe the world otherwise than swimming as one with – or against – it, but always submerged in the diverse oceanic currents. Without a fixed position but rather subject to constant flows, we float in the borderless waters of the digital-material reality we aim to describe. As Deleuze wrote in his late years: “Everywhere surfing has already replaced the older sports.”⁶³

⁵⁷ See for example: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005.

⁵⁸ Here I am of course deliberately simplifying the “flatness” of flat ontologies, as they of course also try to deal with agents in the networks in quite complex ways.

⁵⁹ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 9.

⁶¹ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 16.

⁶² Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 7.

⁶³ Gilles Deleuze, Postscript on the Societies of Control. In: *October*, vol. 59, 1992, p. 6.

But the endless horizon of water could seem overwhelming and scary, especially when we can't frame and stabilize it, or at least not without admitting our own body's presence amidst the crushing waves. Steinberg and Peters also note that many theorists used to condemn the oceanic space as "unknowable, uninscribable, and uncontrollable,"⁶⁴ criticizing exactly its endless surface where "on the waves there is nothing but waves," quoting among others Roland Barthes who called the sea a "non-signifying field [that] bears no message"⁶⁵ – in other words a space we can't really make any sense of. This inescapability of the ocean surface thus could perhaps be correlated with postmodern feelings of a loss of volume and depth, as expressed in late 20th century attempts to describe what was happening with the world under the proliferation of new media. The idea of a highly mediated reality becoming just an endless interplay of surfaces even gave birth to the concept of "depthlessness" coined by probably the most famous critic of the postmodern condition, Fredric Jameson. For him, the popular culture as well as art of the late 20th century simply mirrored the fragmented reality of repetition and pastiche, flattening the metaphorical transcendental "beyond" with pure superficiality pointing nowhere else than to itself.⁶⁶ The repetitive waves seemed to have always been bringing only the "End of History," nothing on the horizon – all the same, all shallow, and all over again.

But as we have already mentioned here, the medium-message (or form-matter) distinction has leaked to the point of a massive rupture which forces us to reconsider how we think about digital media in general. Steinberg and Peters very importantly underline that "water is simultaneously encountered" not only as a surface but also "as a depth,"⁶⁷ advocating for its volume to be recognized. Quoting Michel Serres, they oppose the idea of waves' fruitless repetition, stating that the "nautical murmur" they fill our ears with "is not a matter of phenomenology [but] a matter of being itself."⁶⁸ It could thus be similarly said that reflections on the waves of contemporary liquidity are not reducible to a flat never-ending mirror of the same, showing us the ultimate loss of meaning, but comprise a realm of dynamic and lively "intra-action" (a word theoretical physicist Karen Barad suggests to replace interaction with, to underline the inseparability and mutual constitution of all involved

⁶⁴ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. London: Paladin 1972, quoted in: Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke university Press 1997.

⁶⁷ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Michel Serres, *Genesis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1996, quoted in: Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 5.

agencies)⁶⁹ of “human and non-human (including molecular) elements and affects” that are “not merely passively consumed but imagined, encountered, and produced.”⁷⁰

But apart from the above-mentioned problem of seeing only the surface of the water, there is also the risk of reducing everything to an all-too-seamless unitary flow (as well as limiting it too easily to either networks or objects) and thus ignoring the individual beings, agents and particles that are drawn into and/or responsible for the very fluidity we try to formulate. By speaking of “liquid ontology,” this text thus means to always emphasize what Yuk Hui calls “granularity,”⁷¹ Jane Bennett declares as the “vibrancy” of matter,⁷² and what could perhaps be also heard in Serres’ “nautical murmur” – the irreducible heterogeneous buzzing of different particles constituting any respective flow, including the digital ones.

Shaviro similarly underlines the “dense materiality” at play even “within the weightless realm of digital, electronic images,”⁷³ pointing out their physical interconnectedness with our sensual, cognitive and bodily processes. As theorist McKenzie Wark also observes, electronic media and information itself have unignorable materiality “prior to any discussion of ‘real’ reporting or ‘fake’ news.”⁷⁴ But the self-promoted seamlessness and translucence of Silicon Valley-advertised media image of smart products and digital gadgets feeds the still very popular idea of the digital as “the virtual,” which effervescently teleports itself across the globe without any physical trace, ironically embodying the disembodied floating futurity and light-speed pace of digital technologies’ (promoted) development. Such conception is highly untrue and ecologically problematic, as not only the cars and heavy machinery, but also every bit of data, each Instagram like and sent e-mail leave traces of CO² pollution in the atmosphere – there is nothing “air”-like for a MacBook air except concerning the pollution it creates there. It is thus crucial to remember that (digital) images are not immaterially radiating somewhere behind the “real” world, and that in some sense neither them nor the screens we engage are as flat, “airy” or clean as they first appear.

⁶⁹ As she explains: “The neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.” Karen Barad, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press 2007, p. 33.

⁷⁰ Philip Steinberg, Kimberley Peters, *Wet Ontologies...*, p. 17.

⁷¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2016, p. 30.

⁷² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press 2009.

⁷³ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 13.

⁷⁴ McKenzie Wark, *Sensoria: Thinkers for the Twentieth-First Century*. London: Verso 2020, p. 211.

As American artist Trevor Paglen shows in his photographs of the North Pacific Ocean floor (**figure 3**), we often tend to forget that even in the era of smart cities, Bluetooth headphones, free wi-fi and unlimited mobile data, the internet in fact has NSA-tapped fiberoptic veins running deep under the sea and wrapping across the globe in voluminous clusters. Conveniently enough, media theorist Jussi Parikka thus literally suggests we must “submerge”⁷⁵ ourselves into oceans to understand digital media in their actual materiality – a suggestion we gladly follow, albeit not in a literal sense. In his book *A Geology of Media*, Parikka also points to the very physical data centers, located usually in the cold of North, where the “online” cloud memory is being stored: “The cloud is a building,”⁷⁶ and “[d]ata need air.”⁷⁷

Furthermore, Parikka also reminds us that the touch screens and motherboards of smartphones and personal computers, as well as most contemporary electronic devices, are made of chemical elements, such as silicone and germanium,⁷⁸ as well as diverse metals, whose extraction and/or production often is directly harmful not only to the environment, but also to many other human (as well as non-human) beings. Not only because of these geological exigencies, but also because of where the volatile trash of retired “digital” objects gathers in huge piles – filling the landscape and poisoning the soil and bodies growing out from or traversing it – it is necessary to trace the paths of digital technologies cruising through and across the (nation state) borders (as they without any doubt do, whether through signals or physically), and to understand their localized fragility and physical embeddedness. This situation portends material and even bodily impacts of seemingly untouchable and immaterial digital objects on their surroundings – not only that images can get bruised, but their pixels have sharp edges that often cut deep into human, as well as animal and floral tissue.

This text will avoid losing itself in the underwater caverns of media geology and many other diverse materialist approaches, including the rich branch of German “Kittlerian” media theory, but their understanding of physicality of digital technologies and of the mediation process itself remains important for us, as it formulates key ethical and ecological frameworks for conceptualizing literally anything in our hyper-networked world where, as Benjamin Bratton says, anybody with a smartphone carries a small piece of Africa in his or her pocket.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Andrew Blum, *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*. New York: HarperCollins 2012, p. 258, quoted in: Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media...*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media...*, p. 24

⁷⁸ Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media...*, p. 36

⁷⁹ Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack. On Software and Sovereignty*. Cambridge: MIT Press 2016, quoted in Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media...*, p. 46.

Similarly, as much as this thesis keeps in mind that no flows are straight, regular, or unitary, but always made of streams of different scales and dynamics while at the same time being formed by particles of non-homogenous sizes and types, it also is not our aim here to investigate their inner structures any further. By pointing out the “volume” and the heavy liquid materiality of the physical-digital webs, this thesis understands them primarily as specific ontological qualities from which our experience of the world exudes and by which it is being (trans)formed, and while it is an extremely important task to acknowledge the hierarchies of this voluminosity, we will in this specific vector leave consciously aside any attempts to cut it into layers. This text rather treats the present matter more as a stickily immanent productive material, however “wiggly,”⁸⁰ thick, or “granular,” touching it more in terms of modeling, performative molding or, as we shall see, rendering.

⁸⁰ A word used by theoretical physicist John Wheeler to describe the qualities of matter. John Wheeler: Quantum ideas. Quantum foam. Max Planck and Karl Popper. Accessible at WWW: <[https://www.webofstories.com/play/john.wheel-107 er/77;jsessionid=E2EED64F0D4B0F06D- 9CEAF168EDCACFB](https://www.webofstories.com/play/john.wheel-107%20er/77;jsessionid=E2EED64F0D4B0F06D-9CEAF168EDCACFB)> [uploaded 24. 1. 2008, accessed 25.10. 2020].

1.4. “Just Because It’s Fake Doesn’t Mean I Don’t Feel It:” Methodology between the “Posts”

1.4.1. The Post- and the Pre-

If we are post-contemporary, or post- postmodern, post-internet, or post-whatever – if we are now post-everything – it is because historically-given semantics don’t quite work anymore.

– Armen Avanesian Suhail Malik, *Speculative Time-Complex*

The extreme fluidity produced by the “new media regime” introduced above is often also considered characteristic of a certain “post-postmodern” era, expressed predominantly in the concept of “metamodernity” coined by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, but also by other notions, such as that of the “post-contemporary” of Suhail Malik and Armen Avanesian. Even if the fluidity itself isn’t that new, what – according to them – seems to be increasingly present in theory as well as art is the departure from perceiving fluidity as surfaceness and instead to affirm the all-permeating volatility as a specific ontological quality, which doesn’t make reality impossible but on the contrary mutable, shapable and thus perhaps in some way also potentially changeable.

In their text *Speculative Time-Complex*, published in a “post-contemporary” themed issue of art and fashion-related DIS Magazine, Armen Avanesian and Suhail Malik observe that the impact of volatility produced by the media as well as technologically driven financial instruments drastically reshape our perception of time as well: “Time is changing. Human agency and experience lose their primacy in the complexity and scale of social organization today. The leading actors are instead complex systems, infrastructures and networks in which the future replaces the present as the structuring condition of time.”⁸¹ As if the time wasn’t “flowing away like the water in the river” anymore but started to make whirls and reversed upstream.

⁸¹ Armen Avanesian, Suhail Malik: The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary. *DIS Magazine*. Accessible at WWW: < <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/82090/introduction-to-the-time-complex-postcontemporary/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 5. 4. 2019].

What Malik and Avanessian posit is that most of technology and media, whether falling under the category of social, military, surveillance, financial or otherwise, are now driven by what they call “relations of prehension.”⁸² In these infrastructures, systems and networks governing the more-than-human societies, individual human agents and their cognitive capacities increasingly cease to be the measure of the architecture. Moreover, human phenomenology loses the ability to articulate “meaning, politics, culture and society itself,”⁸³ resulting into an insistent feeling, that “[e]verything now seems to be ‘post-’ something else.”⁸⁴

What they thus call “speculative time-complex”⁸⁵ manifests itself through the diverse preemptive operations, such as the phenomenon of preemptive strikes that create an enemy non-existent at the time of launching the weapons, in practices of preemptive policing able to apprehend people before they even commit any crime,⁸⁶ or simply in everyday life through processes such as preemptive personalization, offering us goods we ourselves don’t yet know we would want. And this direction of causality seems to be at play also in the media, with the strong “tendency towards premediation.”⁸⁷ We are less interested here in the left-accelerationist angle of the post-contemporary concept, focused on the future preceding the present, than in the volatility and mutability of our perception and conception of time itself which it introduces – a time that is “more meteorological in its movements than classically historicist.”⁸⁸ Because the speculative relationship to reality these processes disclose is incipient in a specific way that could be perhaps fittingly expressed in the words of one of the greatest warriors against linear time, American novelist William S. Burroughs – when “[n]othing is real, everything is permitted.”⁸⁹

This quote can be said to be expressive of the aforementioned “feeling of unreality” produced by what is routinely called communicative or cognitive capitalism, which seems to

⁸² Armen Avanessian, Suhail Malik: Introduction to The Time Complex. Postcontemporary. *DIS Magazine*. Accessible at WWW: < <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/82090/introduction-to-the-time-complex-postcontemporary/> > [publication date unknown, accessed 5. 4. 2019].

⁸³ Armen Avanessian, Suhail Malik: Introduction to The Time Complex. Postcontemporary...

⁸⁴ Armen Avanessian, Suhail Malik: The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary...

⁸⁵ The notion of time-complex comes from Bernard Stiegler’s *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, but is used by the authors to slightly different ends.

⁸⁶ China?

⁸⁷ Armen Avanessian, Suhail Malik: The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary...

⁸⁸ Laura Salisbury, Michel Serres: Science: Fiction, and the Shape of Relation. In: *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 33, 2006, No. 1, p. 31.

⁸⁹ William Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981. The discovery of this quote is fully owed to David Burrows and Simon O’Sullivan, who mention that the quote actually originally comes from the 1938 novel *Alamut* by Vladimir Bartol. David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning, The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and* 25

be producing “a mutation in the relation between the virtual and the actual.”⁹⁰ But this melting of boundaries seems to have stopped having only negative connotations in the metamodern, post-contemporary or other recent frameworks. In the introduction to the anthology *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*, the authors specifically write they want to avoid any teleological approach or offering a new dominant regime, claiming that metamodernism is situated “with or among,”⁹¹ or even “between”⁹² other older as well as newer tendencies. The metamodern regime is also said to be characterized by “an oscillating in-betweenness,”⁹³ in which it becomes possible to connect different or even contradictory layers of realities and beliefs without them having to be necessarily opposed. Such approach seems only natural for a world in which linear history collapsed, all narratives were proclaimed to have ended, where the recursive logic reigns and “speculation,” as Malik and Avanessian explain, is the dominant form of influence and orientation.⁹⁴

In their book *Fictioning: The Myth-functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, which brought to my attention also Burroughs’ aforementioned quote, the authors Simon O’Sullivan and David Burrows also notice that contemporary capitalism produces proliferation of “information environments and products in which continuity of narrative is not maintained” and they importantly add that in such a context “affect rather than any meaning or overcoded reality is consumed.”⁹⁵ Rather than a doctrine or a program, which would necessarily fail by their very definition, metamodernism thus seems to be proclaiming itself as, echoing Raymond Williams, “a structure of feeling” – “a sentiment that is so pervasive as to call it structural,” or even “a sensibility that everyone shares, that everyone is aware of, but which cannot easily, if at all, be pinned down.”⁹⁶ This slippery yet all-permeating quality seems to be explainable exactly by Shaviro’s theorization of the digital affect – not located just within ourselves but leaking everywhere around, filling the “between.”

Philosophy. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2019, p. 29, p. 48.

⁹⁰ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 44.

⁹¹ me Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, (eds.), *Metamodernism. Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International 2017, p. 8.

⁹² Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, (eds.), *Metamodernism...*, p. 10.

⁹³ Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, (eds.), *Metamodernism...*, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Armen Avanessian, Suhail Malik: *The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary...*

⁹⁵ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ Met Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, (eds.), *Metamodernism...*, p. 7.

1.4.2. Putting Head Under the Water

“When I was growing up, in the mid-nineties and the early 2000s, I listened to Radiohead. On “There, There,” they sang, “Just because you feel it, doesn’t mean it’s there.” A year or so ago, while watching the television show Girls (episode 3 from the third season), I was struck by a sentence that was at once reminiscent and completely different from that line from the early 2000s. “Just because it’s fake, doesn’t mean I don’t feel it.”

– Timotheus Vermeulen, *The New Depthiness*

In 2015, Timotheus Vermeulen wrote for *E-flux Journal* a text titled *The New Depthiness*. As the name suggests, it attempts to deal exactly with Jameson’s aforementioned “understanding of depthlessness as the last stage in a particular history of a particular flattening”⁹⁷ and advocates for a different approach, that would include certain “kind of deepening”⁹⁸ observable in 21st century art and culture. To illustrate the change, he refers to the formerly omnipresent feeling of the “world as a hall of mirrors,”⁹⁹ as expressed in the above-mentioned Radiohead song, and proposes to change our relation to the shiny surfaces. And interestingly enough, he also turns to the ocean to illustrate it.

Vermeulen recalls the many attempts to conceive the rise of digital media as the “final stage in a history of depthlessness,” which aimed to demonstrate that “there was no reality, no truth, no authenticity outside of the image or the model—and no humanity inside it.” This was particularly being pronounced in connection to the digital code itself, which was often understood as flattening language and meaning into an endless repetitive sea of zeros and ones that didn’t refer to any “realities outside of them.” But it should be clear by now that the relationship between (digital) objects, digital images and “reality” is neither that simple, nor dualistic. Just because it’s not indexical or representational doesn’t mean there are no other options for relations of mutual interference and entanglement. (If we thus should be past something, it is not depth, reality or truth, but the simplified binary of “us and them.”)

It is in this sense that Vermeulen suggests the concept of “depthiness,” which he believes to be capturing certain tendencies perceptible in contemporary art and culture. Through metaphors of different modes of interaction with the water surface, he refutes diving deep under the sea, which would require searching for problematic transcendental meaning

⁹⁷ Timotheus Vermeulen: *The New “Depthiness.” E-flux Journal*, issue 61, 2015. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/61/61000/the-new-depthiness/>> [published january 2015, accessed 3. 5. 2021].

⁹⁸ Timotheus Vermeulen: *The New “Depthiness”*...

⁹⁹ Ibid.

hidden somewhere “beneath” the realm of observable things, but also surfing – which might at first look like the most fitting orientation in a world made of waves. Even Deleuze and Guattari mention “dynamic features that enter a thought that ‘slides’ with new substances of being” and “turn the thinker into ‘a sort of surfer’,”¹⁰⁰ but Vermeulen describes, that the surfer is a “horizontal man”¹⁰¹ who looks for meaning “on the surface, more precisely in the series of waves that form the surface—one after the other after the other, now left, now right, higher and lower.”¹⁰² If we elaborate on what we showed earlier, we might perhaps say that for Vermeulen, the figure of the surfer is aware of the fluidity, catching always the next wave coming, but still believes in the relative referential stability of the board beneath her or his feet.

What Vermeulen suggests is yet a different way of dealing with the fluid world, one articulated with a figure of the “snorkeler.” Such “modality” doesn’t attempt to rescue lost depths resting somewhere on the sea floor, but encourages us to “jump from [the] surfboards into the water, a snorkeling mask in hand.”¹⁰³ If we put our head underneath, we might still not have unlimited access to the ocean depths, but we necessarily will stop mistaking the surface waves for the ocean itself. According to the text, this move entails an important speculative dimension as well: “[w]hereas the diver *moves towards* a shipwreck or a coral reef in the depths of the ocean, and the surfer *moves with* the flow of the waves, the snorkeler swims toward a school of fish whilst drifting with the surface currents.”¹⁰⁴ Importantly, the snorkeler thus imagines depth without experiencing it. “Where might that fish be swimming to?” [s/]he wonders. Or perhaps [s/]he thinks, “What might be below that rock?”¹⁰⁵ This underlines the crucial role of intuition and imagination that allows us to practically relate to the inaccessible depth, to “perceive[e] it without encountering it.”¹⁰⁶

Vermeulen avers this register to be expressive of an overall change in the conception of depth and meaning in the 21st century. Saying that in “philosophy and art alike, notions of the behind and the beyond, the beneath and the inside, have reemerged,”¹⁰⁷ he points to speculative realism’s attempts “to think beyond the surface of the epistemological”¹⁰⁸ as well

¹⁰⁰ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*. London: Verso 2009, p. 71.

¹⁰¹ Alessandro Barrico, *The Barbarians: An Essay on the Mutation of Culture*, New York: Rizzoli International Publications 2014), p. 111, quoted in: Timotheus Vermeulen: The New “Depthiness”...

¹⁰² Timotheus Vermeulen: The New “Depthiness”...

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

as contemporary art's tendency to not only critically reflect on but explore and enter "(hyper)realities: hereditary deficiencies in digital DNA, intertextual features that come to light through another focus, immaterial realities as blueprints for material possibilities."¹⁰⁹ And we might also add the many already mentioned speculative, new materialist tendencies in the world of contemporary art, alongside the even recent trends of new sensitivity or the so called "emo-romantic turn."¹¹⁰

The depth Vermeulen speaks of is thus performative, both in way of its self-actualizing speculative qualities and in the sense of its needing to be performed, imagined or we could perhaps say, "fictioned."¹¹¹ Moreover, he adds that it is a depth that cannot be seen but "perceived," or perhaps "felt," helping us to move through a world where meaning cannot always be constructed from what we directly see, where words and images often don't disclose any core "reality" and where contradiction or interference is the dominant relation. Navigating this highly saturated saline solution – in which our minds and bodies cannot but float – can be a difficult task. So how do we find a heading when the depths are not only beneath us, but all around, within and at once without? Is there an anchor point in this ever-changing unknown sea? The anthology *Fiction as Method* opens itself with an image of the Null Island, based on which all GPS navigation calculates the earth's coordinates. Null Island is not real in the classical sense. It is made (up) into existence, marking the point on the Earth's surface where the Prime Meridian and the Equator intersect, solely to allow the computation of coordinates themselves, navigating us or tagging our photos "to map our memories and images onto the material world."¹¹² Null Island is thus a fiction, but in the end, it does *really* help us make it home. Perhaps in the volatile world where all methods are already fictions, fiction itself can thus be deployed as a legitimate method.

¹⁰⁹ Timotheus Vermeulen: The New "Depthiness"...

¹¹⁰ Michal Novotný: The Emo-Romantic Turn. *Mousse Magazine*. Accessible at WWW: <http://moussemagazine.it/emo-romantic-turn-michal-novotny-2018/> [published 25. 9. 2018, accessed 16. 12. 2020].

¹¹¹ In Burrows' and O'Sullivan's understanding. David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 1–5.

¹¹² Jon K Shaw, Theo Reeves-Everson (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017, p. 6–7.

1.4.3. Moving (between) Images of Contemporary Art

In her fittingly titled text *Gallery Fiction*, art theorist and co-founder of one of the biggest online art sharing platforms Tzvetnik (meaning “a garden full of flowers” in Russian),¹¹³ Natalya Serkova, poses an interesting quandary about reality and believability in the specific context of the art world. She asks: “[A]re you sure that the exhibitions, the documentation of which you can daily observe on websites-aggregators dedicated to art, do exist in reality?” This is of course by no means an attempt to disqualify the validity or importance of images of contemporary art circulating on the web. Quite contrarily, what she wants to point out is the obsolescence of any such question in general, rendering the search for an original physical art piece, as well as an original “space” of the gallery useless.

Because this distinction, as well as the notion of a single “original” truth are obsolete in the world where art objects, created in whatever artistic medium, always already enter into dialogue with digital images. In this sense, it is irrelevant to ponder whether there even was perhaps an analogue photograph, huge room-size metal object or organic tissue at the beginning of an art object’s story, for it was interwoven into the fabric of the digital code and disseminated throughout online platforms. Contemporary art objects “are present somewhere in their material form but are also ubiquitously present online”¹¹⁴ – they have become digital image-objects installed in an entangled, borderless “gallery fiction.”

Without an attempt to build stable categorization, which would necessarily go against the fluid ontological qualities we describe and encounter, this thesis can nevertheless be said to employ a framework wherein such digital(ized) objects of contemporary art could be, according to the previous explanation, characterized as post-postmodern, “post-contemporary,” in many ways post-media (as to the loss of importance of media specificity in art, expressed already in Rosalind Krauss’ notion of the “post-medium condition”)¹¹⁵ and post-(post-)internet. The last demanding to be understood in a similar “post-” relation of which metamodernism also speaks: In both our everyday experience and in art we are post-internet not because we would be in any sense *past* or *after* internet, but because the internet has spilled out of the frame, into the between. This made artist Jesse Darling famously remark

¹¹³ Accessible at WWW: <<https://tzvetnik.online/>>

¹¹⁴ Natalya Serkova: *Gallery Fiction. Towards The New Technology Of Art Dissemination*. *OFluxo*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.ofluxo.net/gallery-fiction-by-natalya-serkova/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 24. 7. 2021].

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson 2000.

that “[e]very artist working today is a postinternet artist,”¹¹⁶ and we can add in similar manner, that every image being interacted with today is a digital image. As Hito Steyerl has it: “[t]he internet is not dead. It is undead and it's everywhere.”¹¹⁷

The moving images of contemporary art accompanying this thesis are thus created in, for and sometimes (but not necessarily) about our aforementioned post-internet or post-digital material, ontological and (environ)mental condition. As such, they are irreducible to mere “images” in sense of flat representations or cut-outs of preexisting reality, but by the tools that helped to bring them into this world as well as by the way they exist for and on the web, they can perhaps be best understood as what Yuk Hui calls “digital objects.” The definition will be developed throughout the third chapter of this text, but for now it could be said to concern digital moving images produced inside of the digital milieu of contemporary art,¹¹⁸ which are interested in, co-produced with or disseminated through operations of digital tools, or as we will see later, digital beings. As such, they actively participate in the process of what we could call “post-digital intra-active fictioning,” or perhaps also “storymorphing.”

There is a quite popular theoretical tendency, among left accelerationists as well as others, to follow Frederic Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, claiming that art can help us navigate and at least partially understand the stormy seas of the shifting world, often driven by forces, temporalities and “hyperobjects” beyond human comprehension. This seems to be one of the few hopes we can rationally believe in. It is not my intention to deny usefulness to this important approach, but this text itself tries to relate to digital objects of moving image art in yet a different way. It does so partly because its fascination for fiction doesn’t want to let it be “explained away,”¹¹⁹ however convenient it might sometimes be, but mainly because it understands digital objects (of moving image art) as being always already co-constitutive of the very consciousness we approach the images with. Its primary interest therefore lies in following the streams, instead of exploring the ways in which art can make things more understandable – digital images don’t serve this thesis as visual or thematic “representations” or even “diagrams” of problems, as much as possibilities to enter their flow.

While maintaining that what we speak about is nothing less than one of the main dynamics at play in today’s world, this text doesn’t aim to and could never be all-explaining

¹¹⁶ Jesse Darling, Post-Whatever #usermilitia. In: Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here Art After the Internet*. Manchester: Cornerhouse, London: SPACE 2014, p. 137.

¹¹⁷ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ The concept of milieu comes from Gilbert Simondon and will be elaborated on in the third chapter.

¹¹⁹ Delphi Carstens, Mer Roberts, *Things That Knowledge Cannot Eat*. In: Jon K Shaw, Theo Reeves-Everson (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017, p. 216.

in all areas it touches upon, many of them being fluid and shifting themselves.¹²⁰ It could thus be said to try to loose an arrow, or, if we stick to our script vocabulary, to submerge its head into the water and drift into a specific current, hoping to sketch a non-linear axis possibly able to, as Deleuze and Guttari had it, “follow the witch’s flight.”¹²¹ This form of transversal movement seems to be a fitting way to get in touch with the unsettled flows of digital images. Because, as Serkova also observes, contemporary art objects “refuse final answers to the questions about themselves,” as on today’s networks in general, “any answer stabilized and verified through a lengthy experiment can be destroyed at any moment by a sudden attack of apple pies”¹²² posted by a different profile.

The present thesis therefore aims to follow digitally produced and disseminated fiction understood as a specific kind of “digital object” produced between human and non-human animate bodies, electronic devices, inorganic and organic agents and what we usually see as purely mental processes, treating it not as a second or third order of (once intact) reality, but as an actual and material world-shaping force which changes reality whether we want it or not and even physically transforms and affects the bodies and minds it traverses. This text is thus about what could be called a productive potential of such digital fiction; not despite but exactly *because of* the extreme effectivity it lends to oftentimes toxic and very dangerous narratives and power flows draining time-spaces of imagination, potentialities and spaces of resistance. It believes that if financial derivatives and other technologically driven actors work to mine, “capture and shut down”¹²³ the future, we need to seek out the digital technical beings they work with and try to create new connections, that could rend fissures in this ungraspable but yet palpable closure. Floating with multiple streams along its way, this text is in a way simply about this encounter: it is about them, us and about what I believe to be one possible meeting place.

¹²⁰ As might have been noticed in sources of some of the quoted texts, the same as traditional media channels are not quite enough to grasp the news anymore, also the theorization of this fluidity seems to be sometimes happening somewhat “outside of academia,” on online, and often art-related platforms. This is addressed for example by Armen Avanessian in: Armen Avanessian, *Accelerating Academia: On Hyperstition in Theory*. In: Dustin Breitling, Vít Bohal, Václav Janoščík, (eds.), *Reinventing Horizons*. Praha: Display 2016. s. 77–98.

¹²¹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?...*, p. 41.

¹²² Natalya Serkova: *Gallery Fiction...*

¹²³ Steven Shaviro, *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism* (e-book). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, p. 24.

2. PRODUCTIVE POETICS OF FICTION

2.1. The Darkening of Thought

Everything has become fluid, and much darker.

– Ccru, Skin-Crawlers

Science-fiction writer Bruce Sterling once described “cultural temperament” of the early 21st century as a “dark euphoria feeling,” relaying in many ways the overall atmosphere of unbelievability and volatility already described above: “Things are just falling apart, you can't believe the possibilities, it's like anything is possible, but you never realized you're going to have to dread it so much. It's like a leap into the unknown. You're falling toward earth at nine hundred kilometers an hour and then you realize there's no earth there.”¹²⁴ In a quite popular book *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*, artist James Bridle (also known for trapping self-driving cars with magic salt circles)¹²⁵ similarly connects our present moment with certain darkening. While digital technologies are usually seen as bringing more knowledge and understanding to the world, making tasks easier and information more available, according to Bridle, “the opposite is true: that which was intended to enlighten the world in practice darkens it.”¹²⁶

In what he calls a new “dark age” despite the extreme abundance of information, “our sources of data are slipping away, and with them the structures by which we have structured the world,”¹²⁷ melting both our environmental and cognitive infrastructure into shapeless chaos of “contradictions and uncertainties.”¹²⁸ Bridle thus concludes that continuously and

¹²⁴ Bruce Sterling: Transcript of Reboot 11 speech by Bruce Sterling, 25-6-2009, *Wired*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.wired.com/2011/02/transcript-of-reboot-11-speech-by-bruce-sterling-25-6-2009/>> [published 25. 2. 2011, accessed 9. 5. 2021].

¹²⁵ James Bridle's web Accessible at WWW: <<https://jamesbridle.com/works/autonomous-trap-001>> [publication date unknown, accessed 13. 7. 2021].

¹²⁶ James Bridle, *New Dark Age. Technology and the End of the Future*. London: Verso 2019, p. 10.

¹²⁷ James Bridle, *New Dark Age...*, p. 58.

¹²⁸ James Bridle, *New Dark Age...*, p. 76.

deliberately changing networks produce certain “practical unknowing,”¹²⁹ a dim all-encompassing cloud which eventually makes all traditional conceptualizations and organizations of thought break down. The “darkening reality” thus in fact expresses a string of interconnected “failures to think and speak”¹³⁰ about the always-too-fast mutations of digitally driven world, which demands, as Bridle argues, “more *liquid* forms of knowing than can be derived from the libraries of the past alone.”¹³¹

This observation echoes numerous remarks of other thinkers, who also notice that philosophy or theory in general, which usually “promises ways to understand the world and ways to live in it” somehow “fails in this endeavour,”¹³² revealing thus the crucial limitations of critical thought, as well as of illusory discursive islands still often dominating contemporary cultural theory.¹³³ Media theorist Rob Coley notes that scale and temporality of both environmental problems and computational infrastructure of capitalism pass “into opacity”¹³⁴ of human cognition, as they are driven by “geomaterial and algorithmic” powers that “although highly active, remain largely imperceptible to humans.”¹³⁵ French philosopher of science Anne-Françoise Schmid similarly explains that classical epistemology doesn’t have “means to describe” such “contemporary objects”¹³⁶ – objects which are not merely complex but altogether ungraspable. As such, they demand the assertion of non-manipulability and unknowability, and thus blur (and even demand crossing) the very distinctions between art, science and philosophy.¹³⁷

Overall, it seems that moving around in this fluid “opacity” requires an altogether different strategy, also in the mode of thought usually referred to as philosophy. The aim of this chapter therefore is to bring together a few thinkers, who suggest ways to radically reformulate not only the relations of the real and the fictional on the level of epistemology, but by reconsidering the role of rational theoretical/philosophical reasoning itself as the only legitimate form of thought. By bringing to focus the very materiality of thought, they knit

¹²⁹ James Bridle, *New Dark Age*..., p. 76.

¹³⁰ James Bridle, *New Dark Age*..., p. 15.

¹³¹ James Bridle, *New Dark Age*..., p. 58. Emphasis added.

¹³² Rob Coley, In Defence of ‘Noir Theory’: Laruelle, Deleuze, and Other Detectives. In: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2019, p. 1.

¹³³ Rob Coley, In Defence of ‘Noir Theory’..., p. 1.

¹³⁴ Rob Coley, In Defence of ‘Noir Theory’..., p. 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Anne-François Schmid, On Contemporary Objects. In: Robin Mackay (ed.), *Simulation, Exercise, Operations*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2015, p. 64. There of course could be a reference made to Timothy Morton’s all-too-famous concept of the hyperobject. See: Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2013.

¹³⁷ Anne-François Schmid, On Contemporary Objects..., pp. 65–68.

together an indispensable net (or in a less watery register, we could perhaps say they lay a philosophical “grounding”) serving as a possible basis for such a “liquid knowledge” that could then maintain considerations of our own relationship with(in) digital technologies explored in the third chapter of this text, as well as further develop and add in more theoretical facets, meanings, and qualities to the fluidity outlined above. The core of this chapter is mostly formed by the thinking of both Gilles Deleuze, alone and together with Félix Guattari and much lesser-known French philosopher François Laruelle. But as their accumulated works span multiple years and projects, we will try to avoid getting too deep, vast or explanatory and focus solely on what we follow – that is, on arguments for re-thinking fiction as a materially productive autonomous force, not subordinated to and flowing over the edges of theoretical “reflection” itself.

2.2. Everything is Black: Theorizing in the Dark

*Who am I, me who is?
I am neither this reason nor this way of thinking,
neither this question nor this speculation. I am this night...*

– François Laruelle, *Biography of the Eye*

Chemist and philosopher Isabelle Stengers writes in *Reclaiming Animism*, that we have “an obscure fear of being accused of regression as soon as we give any sign of betraying hard truth by indulging soft, illusory beliefs.”¹³⁸ But according to both her and François Laruelle, it is the very concept of truth as a product of knowledge which, especially under contemporary fluid climate, urgently needs reformulation. Laruelle points out that the whole history of western philosophy is in fact written from a perspective of unquestioned self-centered “auto-positioning”¹³⁹ of philosophy above other forms of knowledge which it claims to be entitled to observe, name, classify, judge, and reflect upon, in his words – “to philosophise is to dominate.”¹⁴⁰

Moreover, as he explains, it is also a history of binarity of philosophers “forever transiting between shadow and illumination,”¹⁴¹ trying to “shed light on” the dark areas of the unknown. But this self-proclaimed illuminating potential, always promising an answer developed on the base of rational judgement, is inherently “arrogant,”¹⁴² because it presupposes that philosophy can position itself as the chosen light-bringer in the first place. To grant ourselves such a position would necessarily denote the ability to stand on a more or less stable viewpoint over and above the slimy quicksand of the real, from which we could see, frame, observe, and qualify. But as we already laid out in the first chapter, such an

¹³⁸ Isabelle Stengers: *Reclaiming Animism*. *E-flux*, n. 36, 2012. Accessible at WWW:

<<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61245/reclaiming-animism/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 6. 1. 2021].

¹³⁹ Simon O’Sullivan, *Non-philosophy and Art Practice (Or Fiction as Method)*. In: Jon K Shaw, Theo Reeves-Evison (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017, p. 282.

¹⁴⁰ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided. In: *From Decision to Heresy. Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2012, p. 5. [The introduction to the book functions more as an interview, combining passages of Laruelle’s own thoughts with Mackay’s explanations.]

¹⁴¹ Alexander R. Galloway: *The Black Universe*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://onscenes.weebly.com/philosophy/the-black-universe>> [published 25. 8. 2017, accessed 24. 11. 2020].

¹⁴² Simon O’Sullivan, *Non-philosophy and Art Practice (Or Fiction as Method)*. In: Jon K Shaw, Theo Reeves-Evison (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Sternberg Press 2017, p. 278.

observatory doesn't exist. Moreover, the very idea of "bringing to light" comes with an unquestioned assertion "that blackness is a case that can and must be solved."¹⁴³

But who has the right to claim for themselves this illuminating power? Who stands outside of opaque waters – intact, dry, and objective? We seem to have been always too sure in our attempts to gain mastery over the world and to preach the knowledge further. Bridle, in a way less theoretical manner, connects this darkening specifically to digital media, stating that we are often convinced "that throwing light upon the subject is the same thing as thinking it, and thus having agency over it. But the light of computation just as easily renders us powerless – either through information overload, or a false sense of security."¹⁴⁴ It thus seems that especially in the fast-shifting world of what we perceive as present, entangled and stretched across endless flowing networks of physical-digital bodies and objects, it is perhaps obvious more than ever that all the surf boards are broken, and we are left staring into the thickening darkness of the endless sea.

Coley further notes that despite increasing embroilment in geological and computational forces beyond our rational, cognitive and physical recognition, contemporary theory (notably, even that which belongs to "posthumanities") is in fact "obsessed with regaining mastery over an object of knowledge."¹⁴⁵ But such mastery is always necessarily achieved by "mutilating, in multiple senses, the object that we wished to understand."¹⁴⁶ Philosopher and theologian Anthony Paul Smith similarly writes in his book on Laruelle that "philosophers (and perhaps theorists more generally) often claim to make something understandable [...] by disempowering the abstraction inherent in the object they are philosophizing."¹⁴⁷ But the highly problematic supposition of the right to reflect on the world and explain it away, as well as the achievability of an analytical distance that would allow us to do so in the first place, seem to fundamentally crumble under the onslaught of the darkening unknown, which doesn't crawl only from some "Outside" but according to Laruelle, resides in the very core of philosophical thought itself – "the real is opaque, an immanent blackness that humanist philosophy has forgotten or foreclosed in its decision to bring to light a World."¹⁴⁸

In his text *On the Black Universe*, Laruelle describes the World¹⁴⁹ as the illuminated space of our own construction which we so often mistake for the whole Universe, ignoring

¹⁴³ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ James Bridle, *New Dark Age*..., p. 185.

¹⁴⁵ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Anne-François Schmid, *On Contemporary Objects*..., p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2016, p. 121.

¹⁴⁸ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 10.

thus “the thinking force before all thought,”¹⁵⁰ which exists within us as material beings without the need for philosophy or ontology as such – “[t]he Universe was ‘in’ the World and the World did not see it.”¹⁵¹ Laruelle thus offers an interesting perspective on the darkening we face, when he invokes the equalizing power of the dark, as the unity of what he names the “Black Universe,” which remains always untouched by our attempts to divide it with one-directional and limited rays of light. The figure of the Black Universe therefore is not opposed to any light, but more of a blackness without negation, “an opaque and solitary thought, which has already leapt through man's shut eyes as the space of a dream without dreaming.”¹⁵²

When speaking of the gesture of dividing, and in general when bringing Laruelle into any digital-related context, it is necessary to mention the work of theorist and programmer Alexander R. Galloway, who in a similar manner argues that the relationship between philosophy and the digital cannot be approached through relations “of” or “as” but rather “in” – not through developing a “philosophy of the digital” or “digitalization of philosophy,” but to rather address the “digital-*in*-philosophy and philosophy-*in*-digital.”¹⁵³ But we must also underline that Galloway works with a rather different understanding of the digital (and correspondingly, the analogue). Approaching the concepts not in terms of technical or digital objects but based on the arithmetical terms of ratio (logos) and proportion (analogos) leads him to, at first, a rather strange conclusion: that most philosophy has in fact always been digital, because it continuously operates through the binary principle of dividing things. He thus suggests that trying to avoid this makes Laruelle in a sense non-digital, as what he advocates for is the undivided nonbinary unity. But in this understanding even analogue photography is, as Galloway himself mentions, paradoxically, digital.¹⁵⁴ Our claim that the digital becomes increasingly real, or more in Laruelian terms, One with the Real, could thus perhaps be, from this perspective, interestingly comprehensible as the digital becoming analog – however contradictory it might sound – and undividable from the “real” world, all oozing together in a “relation that is neither dialectical nor differential.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ The capital letters are left in the quotes of Laruelle’s concepts of the “World,” the “Universe” or the “Real,” as he himself has them capitalized or when this text directly speaks of them. However, the quotes by other authors are left in the original way.

¹⁵⁰ John Mullarkey, Anthony Paul Smith (eds.), *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012, p. 52.

¹⁵¹ François Laruelle, On the Black Universe. In: Eugene Thacker, Daniel Colucciello Barber, Nicola Masciandaro, Alexander Galloway, *Dark Nights of the Universe*. NAME publications 2013, p. 105.

¹⁵² François Laruelle, On the Black Universe..., p. 103.

¹⁵³ Alexander Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2014, p. 220. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander Galloway, Manuel Correa: The Philosophical Origins of Digitality. Accessible at WWW:

<<https://tripleampersand.org/the-philosophical-origins-of-digitality/>> [published 9. 2. 2015, accessed 5. 8. 2021].

¹⁵⁵ Alexander Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, p. 172. Original emphasis removed.

If we return directly to Laruelle, it is exactly because of this relation that the Black Universe, and in the same way the whole project of what he calls “non-philosophy” (or later, “non-standard philosophy”) is not something to reach out to, to discover or to penetrate, but rather to slide *into*, to be merged with, to get lost *in*, to give up claims for. Because as Laruelle explains, “black is entirely interior to itself and to man,”¹⁵⁶ it is the very material we are made of, which surrounds us, which we think through, and which thinks through us. (As Eugene Thacker has it: “thinking the hair, mud, and dirt that thinks through me.”)¹⁵⁷ But to come into contact we must turn off the remaining lights, forget what we thought we knew and shut our eyes. Because the orientation in this impenetrable, fluid darkness of the black requires a different regime of vision, a “blind” vision for the world where “everything is illuminated, but nothing is seen,”¹⁵⁸ or in the words of the hybrid theoretical entity called Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (C cru) – “a tool-kit for dabbling in the dark.”¹⁵⁹

But this mode of “theorizing in the dark,”¹⁶⁰ which Laruelle calls “vision-in-black,”¹⁶¹ is not an enhanced vision achievable through additional knowledge or any sort of extension, nor can the darkness be chased away with a stronger flashlight. On the contrary, we can start “seeing” in the night exactly when we shut our eyes and embrace certain “visionary vision that looks without looking.”¹⁶² But how do we tap into what knowledge can’t chew on and which we cannot directly see, hear, nor rationally comprehend? Simon O’Sullivan explains that Laruelle’s non-philosophy implies “a form of gnosis or even ‘spiritual’ knowledge.”¹⁶³ This spiritual is that which “haunt[s] the margins of philosophy,” letting in something which makes it “related to gnosticism and science-fiction,”¹⁶⁴ something that must, from philosophy’s view-point, always remain a secret, fantasy or a mystery, which it cannot reach. Admitting the existence of such an untouchable secret which “has never been the predicate to knowledge,”¹⁶⁵ can “delimit philosophy, as a relatively narrow space of thought that must be

¹⁵⁶ François Laruelle, *On the Black Universe...*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁷ Eugene Thacker, *Remote: The Forgetting of the World*. In: Eugene Thacker, Daniel Colucciello Barber, Nicola Masciandaro, Alexander Galloway, *Dark Nights of the Universe*. NAME publications 2013, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ James Bridle, *New Dark Age...*, p. 185.

¹⁵⁹ C cru, *Review of CCRU’s Digital Hyperstition*. In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017, p. 13. [C cru was an experimental collective active in the second half of the 1990s around the Philosophy Department of Warwick University in England.]

¹⁶⁰ Rob Coley, *In Defence of ‘Noir Theory’...*, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ François Laruelle, *On the Black Universe...*, p. 106.

¹⁶² Alexander Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2014, p. 149.

¹⁶³ Simon O’Sullivan, *Non-philosophy and Art Practice (Or Fiction as Method)*. In: Jon K Shaw, Theo Reeves-Everson (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017, p. 280.

¹⁶⁴ François Laruelle: *A New Presentation of Non-Philosophy*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.onphi.org/download/pdf/32>> [publication date unknown, accessed 8. 7. 2021]

¹⁶⁵ François Laruelle, *The Truth According To Hermes: Theorems on The Secret And Communication*. In: *PARRHESIA* 9 (2010), p. 18–22.

supplemented by something extra-philosophical,”¹⁶⁶ that is, to necessarily speak in non-philosophical language.

This realization that philosophy – and as Laruelle immediately reminds, every discipline – has ultimately its own point of “sufficiency,”¹⁶⁷ has of course crucial consequences for theoretical thought itself because it discredits attempts to dominate as well as to knock together frames which could hold reality in any stable place. But instead of “upgrading the discipline,”¹⁶⁸ which would in a sense also entail reaching outside of itself and leaping into the unknown, Laruelle rather suggests turning to the “non-knowledge at the center of all theory, according to which all claims of knowledge are made.”¹⁶⁹

Laruelle’s Non-philosophy, or what he later also calls “non-standard philosophy” thus doesn’t place itself *against* or after philosophy, but, in his own words, it could instead be said to work as “a continuation of every philosophy.”¹⁷⁰ The “non” thus doesn’t create a relation of opposition, which would attempt to refute former concepts and modes of thought and replace them with yet another “better dictator,” but rather expresses a movement across and *between* – and here we retain the theme initiated in the first chapter, pertaining to the function of prepositions. In this manner, Anne-Françoise Schmid similarly speaks of the need to always think philosophies in plural, as a “multiplicity of philosophies”¹⁷¹ which could allow us to exit the vicious circle of constant negation and refutation and instead advocate for, as Laruelle himself pronounced in a conversation with Derrida, “the equivalence of all philosophical decisions, or in other words, [...] democracy and peace.”¹⁷² (This can also be applied to the theoretical approach of this text itself, building among others, on claims from both Laruelle and Deleuze and Guattari, who despite the similarities in respective immanently materialist approaches as well as shared interest in fiction and philosophizing in traditionally non-philosophical ways, still in many ways crucially disagree.)

¹⁶⁶ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 15.

¹⁶⁷ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 8.

¹⁶⁸ Rob Coley, In Defence of ‘Noir Theory’..., p. 18.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Anne-Françoise Schmid, L’épistémologie entre science et philosophie, Hal archives-ouvertes.fr, 1997. Accessible at WWW: <<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00006573/document>> [publication date unknown, accessed 3. 30. 2020].

¹⁷² Conversation between François Laruelle and Jacques Derrida, in which Laruelle among other issues addresses the differences between their work, refuting, among other things, Derrida’s claim that he „conjoin[s] ontology and deconstruction.” Jacques Derrida, François Laruelle, Controversy over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy. *La Decision Philosophique* No. 5, April 1988, pp. 62-76, Translated by Robin Mackay. Accessible at WWW: <<https://pervegalit.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/laruelle-derrida.pdf>> [uploaded 22. 2. 2005, accessed 1. 8. 2021].

We can thus say that exactly because philosophy doesn't claim to be "another take on the real,"¹⁷³ explaining it away and combating oppositional concepts, while still importantly "proceed[ing] from the real,"¹⁷⁴ as infrastructural and "radically immanent precondition for all things,"¹⁷⁵ it might be an adequate vision for the illegibility and dense opacity of the close-knit and yet unknowable world – "a practice of thinking according to the real rather than about it."¹⁷⁶ Instead of following the endless expansion and seeking to illuminate some dark corners, non-philosophy's non-knowledge could be thus perhaps understood in certain similarity to what Deleuze called "Cogito for a dissolved self"¹⁷⁷ – a mode of volatile, fleeting, but also heavily entangled thought with respect for the unknown, which "dives right in[to]"¹⁷⁸ the blackness and swims with eyes wide shut, sensing the dark depths it cannot reach.

¹⁷³ David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 318.

¹⁷⁴ David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 317.

¹⁷⁵ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press 1994, p. xxi.

¹⁷⁸ Rob Coley, In Defence of 'Noir Theory' ..., p. 7.

2.3. From the Mirror to the Sea

Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.

– Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

The shedding of light problematized in the previous subchapter is closely connected to the process of “reflection” and the very idea that everything is and should be reflected upon. It seems uneasy to throw overboard such a classical theoretical tool, so why Laruelle’s non-philosophy “refuses to reflect on things”?¹⁷⁹ As Stengers notes with slight irony, we might falter when facing the “frightening possibilities that would follow if we gave up critique, the only defense we have against fanaticism and the rule of illusions.”¹⁸⁰ But if we look around (even with our eyes open), there just seems to be something wrong with the mirrors. As if the world was, as Shaviro writes, always “a few steps ahead of any possible critical reflection.”¹⁸¹

A classical metaphor for critical thinking, the mirror was once seen as an image of the world and whoever would hold it could frame, critically analyze, and interpret this image and reflect the beam of light back onto the face of the World. But its dialectical and metaphorical power has started to wane. The harder it became to find a stable ground to stand on, “sinking into the pitch-black waters of a groundless world,”¹⁸² the more the mirror seemed to show cracks and lose its luster. In a world where, as Karen Barad writes, “[t]here is no fixed dividing line between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘past’ and ‘present’ and ‘future’, ‘here’ and ‘now’, [and] ‘cause’ and ‘effect’,” any attempt to frame individuals and “propertied objects” in a simply observable and reflect-able way seems absurd.¹⁸³ To demonstrate this, she even uses the highly discussed phenomenon of quantum entanglement, disbelievingly nicknamed a “spooky action at a distance” by Albert Einstein, in which two or more particles could be said to “share an existence.” Explaining that such findings of contemporary quantum mechanics research defy “commonsense notions of communication ‘between’ entities ‘separated’ by

¹⁷⁹ François Laruelle, *The Truth According To Hermes: Theorems on The Secret And Communication*. In: *PARRHESIA* 9 (2010), p. 18–22.

¹⁸⁰ Isabelle Stengers: *Reclaiming Animism...*

¹⁸¹ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 93.

¹⁸² François J. Bonnet, *The infra-world*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017, p. 8.

¹⁸³ Karen Barad, *Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come*, *Derrida Today* 3, n. 2, 2010, p. 265.

arbitrarily large spaces and times,”¹⁸⁴ she thus fiercely proclaims that “between will never be the same.”¹⁸⁵

But the mirror-image started to morph long before (if its reflection ever really worked in the first place). Already in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari called for “the abolition of all metaphor,”¹⁸⁶ pointing out how late the mirror-image comes, boasting a mere simplified cut-out of a much more complex reality of a “world [which] has become chaos.”¹⁸⁷ The illusory separation of the image from the material world it should reflect preconditions the existence of any sort of clear mirror, making the image too-frozen, too-stable, and lifeless. Deleuze and Guattari, for most of their shared journey, have led a guerrilla war against such dualistic, repetitive and in their eyes impotent logic of representation and reflection. Most famously in the *Rhizome* introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they refute the traditional conceptualization of the figure of “the book,” standing in for potentially any kind of (human) creation, as that which “imitates the world” and is driven by the “law of reflection”¹⁸⁸ – further explaining that such a figure merely replicates an imprinted binary logic that always structures everything into tidy dualistic dichotomies. They argue rather that “the book is not an image of the world,”¹⁸⁹ precisely because it grows out of and flows back into “outside” material conditions and as such it is inseparable from the very world it tries to describe, reflect, or capture. As Barad therefore already made clear, the “between” of things is thus not an empty gap but a flow of unstoppable intra-actions and mutations which elude any number of mirrors we could install – there seems to be no metaphor, only metamorphosis. This “aparaallel evolution”¹⁹⁰ is routinely demonstrated with reference to Deleuze’ and Guattari’s famed wasp and orchid, whose relation (unlike the convention asserting that the orchid imitates the smell of a solitary wasp) is not that of imitation, but of “veritable becoming,”¹⁹¹ in which both involved elements mutually and irreversibly change. Deleuze and Guattari hereby criticize the prevalent notion of *mimésis* serving as a guiding principle in all human activities, including art, because it bears at its very core the dualist, mirror logic they aim to avoid – the one of the book as the image of the world. The mirror reflection, representation and in the same sense the metaphor are thus to be taken as “despotic

¹⁸⁴ Karen Barad, *Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations...*, p. 251.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau...*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁸ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 10.

agenc[ies]” of emptied signifiers substituting themselves “for asignifying proper names.”¹⁹² As Barad points out elsewhere: reflection could work only within “an ontology exorcised of ghost”; rather, they keep filling the “between,” no light frightening them away.

The 90s cyberculture similarly noticed the darkening of the mirror, which could no longer show any stable transcendental imaginary – shrugging off “the repressive shackles of reflection,”¹⁹³ shapes and colors “collapsed into digital codings”¹⁹⁴ and faded into black. As cultural theorist Mark Fisher, known also for being affiliated¹⁹⁵ with the illegible body of Ccru, writes: “we will no longer pass through to ‘the other side’, we encounter the ‘flat’ surface of the black mirror.”¹⁹⁶ Such a mirror cannot reflect, mimic or project, but nor does it replace the whole surface of the world which would have disappeared. As Land puts it: “reflection is always very late, derivative, and even then really something else.”¹⁹⁷ This disruption is by no coincidence correlated to the rise of digital media, which evolve “functionally, and not representationally,”¹⁹⁸ and whose very logic makes reflection impossible, as the relationship between the digital realm and the world “is not metaphorical at all,”¹⁹⁹ but made of the same material. “Touching the black mirror” of early cyberculture,²⁰⁰ all we thus could have encountered was an opaque surface where the image and the world, or fact and fiction, conflated.

But this surface, flattened to the very same material plane with the world, is not just an inhuman interface of water-cooled brains of former cyberpunk AIs. As if the hyperstitional²⁰¹ statement to be found in one of Ccru’s texts fulfilled itself only now: Black mirror’s blackness seems to have truly “become fluid, and much darker.”²⁰² The opaque flatness which in the 90s

¹⁹² Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 28.

¹⁹³ Robin Mackay, Ray Brassier, Editor’s Introduction. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011, p.18.

¹⁹⁴ Nick Land, Circuitries. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011, p. 290.

¹⁹⁵ We respect the intentional hybridity and illegibility practiced by Ccru in terms of clarity about its members and authorship.

¹⁹⁶ Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction*. New York: Exmilitary Press New York 2018, p. 142.

¹⁹⁷ Nick Land, Circuitries..., p. 295.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs...*, p. 143.

²⁰⁰ Nick Land, Cyberspace Anarchitecture as Jungle-War. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011, p. 403.

²⁰¹ The concept of „hyperstition” has become a necessary part of the vocabulary of all forms of accelerationism and was used by Ccru to describe „fictions that make themselves real.” Ccru, Lemurian Time War. In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017, p. 35.

²⁰² Ccru, Skin-Crawlers, In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017, p. 201.

may have still been able to “flip over”²⁰³ time and open different nonlinear time-spaces, has turned into a sort of liquid whirl on a Laruellian-black sea in which we always already float. Laruelle writes that the “Universe is not reflected in another universe, and yet the Remote is accessible to us at each of its points.”²⁰⁴ His version of the ultimate black mirror could thus be both outside and inside, remote and within, nowhere and everywhere at the same time. Emphasizing that “[t]he forgetting of [wo]man as One(-of-)the-Universe and the Universe as One-through-[wo]man” happens easily; he writes that the black (mirror) is not an object, but something we see in each other, in ourselves and which also sees through us. It is the darkest radical immanence that “no longer differentiates between surfaces and depth but thinks according to the given identity of a non-conceptual thought and the radical indivisibility of the body.”²⁰⁵ The aim of non-philosophy thus is “not to be submitted once again to the reflexivity of philosophy”²⁰⁶ but to expand imagination and speculation far beyond “representational limits.”²⁰⁷

Because ours is a completely frameless ontology of a fluid dark world where, as Barad observes, “[b]oundaries do not sit still,”²⁰⁸ but pass through, beneath and behind, entangled across space and past-present-future, constantly changing, and making us question the known, the knowable as well as the knowledge itself. And in the Universe’s true blackness where there can be no candles lit, no shadows cast and no images reflected, all matter is dark and enchantedly active, flooding the “between.”

²⁰³ Ccru, *Cybergothic Hyperstition* (Fast-forward to the Old ones). In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Urbanomic 2017, p. 223.

²⁰⁴ François Laruelle, *On the Black Universe...*, p. 104.

²⁰⁵ John Mullarkey, Anthony Paul Smith (eds.), *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy...*, p. 52.

²⁰⁶ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 27.

²⁰⁷ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, p. 78.

²⁰⁸ Karen Barad: *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward An Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT4400/v14/pensumliste/barad_posthumanist-performativity.pdf> [publication date unknown, accessed 23. 4. 2020].

2.4. Everything is Real: Irreducible Materiality of Thought

My problem is really that of how to treat philosophy as a material, and thus also as a materiality - without preoccupying oneself with the aims of philosophy, of its dignity, of its quasi-theological ends, of philosophical virtues, wisdom etc. None of that interests me.

– François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy. Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*

[T]heoria is always also a praxis – failing which it is nothing but chatter. The question of philosophy is first of all that of action.

– Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*

So if, as we have shown, the image is always one with “the Real,” and thus is always already saturated in the opaqueness it aims to reflect, it needs also be viewed as necessarily influencing all flows it joins or crosses. This has of course radical implications for the role of images in general, as well as for any form of thought emerging from the black waters of a (not only) Laruellian Universe. It is in a similar sense that Deleuze and Guattari state, that “[t]here is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made,”²⁰⁹ underlining thus the inseparability of any form of thinking from the material conditions it grows through as well as the very real physical existence of even those processes that are often considered abstract and immaterial.

This line of thinking could be traced back to the whole problem of the division philosophy has erected between matter and spirit, famously criticized in Spinoza’s claim that “[w]e do not know what the body can do.”²¹⁰ As Deleuze explains in *Spinoza: Practical philosophy*, this sentence is a provocation pointing to our ignorance in speaking “of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions,”²¹¹ while the material body itself surpasses our knowledge. But, as he – for us, even more importantly – concludes, it also leads to a realization that thought itself “surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.”²¹² This means, following Spinoza’s criticism of cartesian body-mind dualism, not only that thinking is

²⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 4.

²¹⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 2, quoted in: Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Light Books 1988, p. 17.

²¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy...*, p. 17.

²¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy...*, p. 18.

inseparably rooted in the physicality of human body, but also that thought itself is a material force that potentially exceeds both our conscious understanding of it and the borders of (a single) human body per se.

Laruelle also underlines the material productivity of theoretical thinking when he suggests that we stop asking what non-philosophy *is* but instead what it “can and cannot *do*,”²¹³ emphasizing therein the performative agency which, in a certain sense, smudges even the usual divide between theory and practice. Echoing this sentiment, Shaviro paraphrases Deleuze and Guattari, but in the specific context of digital moving images: “if we wish to grasp the operation of post-cinematic forms ‘we will never ask what a [media work] means, as signified or signifier’; rather, ‘we will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities’.”²¹⁴

In consonance with the title of Deleuze’s book on Spinoza, Laruelle thus advocates for directly making the “*practice* of thinking itself” sort of an “object or material.”²¹⁵ In an attempt to “treat philosophy as [its own] material,” Laruelle even speaks, as Smith explains, of the “mutual mutating” of philosophy and other materials into a “new practice whereby what is thought is practiced at the same time.”²¹⁶ And this accentuation of materiality and practical effectivity comes as a necessary consequence of philosophy’s descent from its illusory pedestal – its lowering of a sort – and its submersion into the thick black sludge of the Real. Because, the moment it is acknowledged as part of the world, it must be understood as operational in it.²¹⁷ Or in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s terms, the very inextricability of “the book” from other matters and processes opens a possibility for it to exist actively in these nets – exactly *because* it is (part) of the world, it has certain power to transform it.

Moreover, Laruelle also states that non-philosophy has to abandon philosophy’s logocentrism; as it begins working not on or about but with(in) the Real, engaging necessarily with different modes of material than those connected only to language and writing, it “would no longer be anthro-po-logical (a philosophical amalgam of man and logos).”²¹⁸ This also immediately brings into question the very idea from Deleuze and Guattari that affects are

²¹³ François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy. Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2012, book annotation.

²¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 4, quoted in: Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 120.

²¹⁵ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 78. Emphasis added.

²¹⁶ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 39.

²¹⁷ In this sense, as Ó Maoilearca observes, there is a big difference between non-philosophy and diverse tendencies of new materialisms, because Laruelle’s pairing of materialism with immanence is way more radical.

²¹⁸ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p.12.

“nonhuman becomings of [wo]man,”²¹⁹ which will grow in importance in the context of the second half of this thesis. As a consequence of this decentering of logos, philosophy itself “becomes just one mode of thinking alongside a whole host of others: artistic, but also scientific, even, perhaps, the animal.”²²⁰ (On the other hand, it is necessary to note that escaping language-based thinking is of course easier said than done, as this text, and for that matter Laruelle’s own texts, use language to express their concerns. But the attempt at initiating such movement is, at least in our case, much more about affording materiality to thinking itself and a form of reasoning to other-than-linguistic modes of thought.) But as O’Sullivan and Burrows importantly point out, non-philosophy doesn’t position itself as simply “an outside to philosophy,”²²¹ because it “does not turn away from philosophical materials so much as it reuses or, we might say, retools or reconfigures them.”²²² This *retooling* is crucial for us, because it renders also philosophy or in the same sense any other thought creating and navigating itself through concepts, a lively creative force capable of transforming itself, while also bringing into question the idea of specific methods, objects or materials that could initiate such a process.

This belief in creativity and material productivity of thought is of course a key motif also for Deleuze and Guattari, who repeatedly emphasize that philosophy is the “art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts,” bringing thus actively into existence something that hasn’t been there before, “something different in and from the world.”²²³ But this performativity (because, as they have it: “[t]he map has to do with performance”) ²²⁴ is also conjoined with the act of speculation, through which a thought even has the power and should attempt to “summon forth” what Deleuze and Guattari name “a new earth.”²²⁵ Because of this self-actualizing future-orientation, “writing,” but in the same sense, any other creative production, “has nothing to do with signifying,” but with active “surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”²²⁶ And as these realms are not existing as of now, they need to be in some way, as Smith has it, “made,”²²⁷ “conjured into existence”²²⁸ or we might say – fictioned.

²¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*..., p. 169. Original emphasis removed.

²²⁰ Simon O’Sullivan, *Non-philosophy and Art Practice (Or Fiction as Method)*..., p. 289

²²¹ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning*..., p. 316.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning*..., p. 26.

²²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*..., p. 12.

²²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*..., p. 99.

²²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*..., p. 5.

²²⁷ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought*..., p. 119.

²²⁸ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning*..., p. 23.

2.5. Tool-kits for Dabbling in The Dark: Moving between Philosophy, Art And Science

There is much more possible than what philosophy can imagine.

– John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal*

Any examination of wishful thinking will show that horizons of expectation (collective protentions), based more or less phantasmatically on 'magical' beliefs, 'pious' wishes and the confusion of desire with reality, have effects on the course of things, effects that may be either positive or negative.

– Bernard Stiegler,
The Age of Disruption. Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism

In the foreword to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze famously stated that philosophical writing should be “in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction,”²²⁹ as well as that “it should be possible to recount a real book of past philosophy as if it were an imaginary and feigned book.”²³⁰ What he seems to be expressing here is first the conviction – which is strengthened throughout his later works with Guattari – that certain speculation, forward-thinking or fictioning is necessary for philosophy to be creative and thus working against the established order (or in Laruelle’s terms, the “World”), but second, that theoretical reasoning itself is not fiction-like only when it directly wants to engage with fiction, but can also be entangled with fictional qualities in a way less (self-)acknowledged and transparent manner.

Such claim of course bears radical destabilization of traditional self-conception of philosophy itself, which, as film theorist and philosopher John Ó Maoilearca comments, usually entertains the “self-serious rhetoric” and demands to be viewed “realistically.”²³¹ What is once again expressed here, is that theory presupposes its objective dominance over the subject it talks about, and it acts the same way even when dealing with fiction. As he further notes, philosophy often brings “the fictional into philosophy,”²³² but mostly in the way

²²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*..., p. xx.

²³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*..., p. xxii.

²³¹ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal*..., p. 78.

²³² Ibid.

of “literary fiction” which doesn’t help to create any “non” but only supports philosophy’s “autorealism,”²³³ utilizing fiction as a static inanimate object for validation of its claims. What Laruelle thus wants is for fiction to be treated as “the Real of fiction that disturbs philosophy’s claim to understand fiction *philosophically*.”²³⁴ Because, as Maoilearca notes, whether philosophy advocates for strict realism or radical anti-realism, both remain on certain level just “positions *on* the Real,”²³⁵ making their own truth-claims *about* fiction.

Laruelle therefore suggests that philosophy has always been approaching fiction in an unproductive way. Because of its “auto-positioning” “arrogance,” it was always “tolerating” or including fiction “on condition of announcing itself to it and deciding on its essence,”²³⁶ dragging it thereby into its own framework and making absolute statements about “philosophical position of fiction in relation to the real.”²³⁷ Such remarks immediately bring us back to some of the notions of the supposed disappearance of the real (outlined in the previous chapter), which appear ever-more convincingly as being heralded from the position of an endangered thinker losing the last impressions of firm ground beneath his or her feet, being, as Laruelle notes elsewhere, simply “afraid of the dark.”²³⁸

But exactly because fiction has “no distance from the real,”²³⁹ as they both float “in-One,” it can no longer be considered a mere “mode of non-being, of the false”¹³⁷ which could passively exist for philosophy to use in the first place, and neither can theory itself be disclosed as fictional (for example, under a premise that everything is somehow a fiction). Laruelle understands fiction not as a category of philosophy, nor any other discipline or genre, whether literally or visual, but instead as an active force, “an effect of the real,”²⁴⁰ which philosophy can’t grasp, because it realizes itself (semi-)autonomously also through philosophy itself. What he introduces with the concept of “philo-fiction”²⁴¹ could thus be characterized as a crucial reconfiguration of fiction through a rebellious transversal movement “against ‘philosophy’s authority’ over it: fiction must no longer be subordinated to the

²³³ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 78.

²³⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 135.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ François Laruelle, *On the Black Universe...*, p. 109.

²³⁹ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 135.

²⁴⁰ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 99.

²⁴¹ Laruelle changes the vocabulary throughout multiple books, non-philosophy being called non-standard philosophy and philo-fiction being sometimes synonymous with it while other times being otherwise growing into “hyperspeculation” or “fictionale.” For the clarity of meaning, we will stick to the term “philo-fiction” or simply fiction.

judgments of philosophy. Instead, philosophy will be made to ‘reenter’ through fiction and be conceived as a mode of the ‘radical experience’ of fabulation.”²⁴²

Maoilearca importantly notes, that philo-fiction is not even a specific category, but in fact “another name for non-philosophy” itself, albeit “one that emphasizes more its association with art, and in particular the making of art from philosophical materials.”²⁴³ But non-philosophy or philo-fiction has to be radically distinguished from any philosophy *of* art and could perhaps be better understood, as Smith points out, as “art of thought.”²⁴⁴ Because when it “engages with art [...] it cannot simply be through writing a gallery catalogue, but must find a way to *turn itself into* a kind of artistic practice by using artistic materials.”²⁴⁵ But it is not only philosophy that would be borrowing material from art; as Smith further notes, “Laruelle’s conception of non-philosophy assumes that the regional forms of knowing (like visual art, fabulation, and aesthetics in this case) already think” themselves.²⁴⁶ This makes them, as was already demonstrated, irreducible to objects of theoretical analysis or reflection and gives them certain agency of their own (as we shall see further), actively stepping into the field philosophy or theory usually claims exclusively for itself.

In the same aforementioned foreword, Deleuze also expresses the conviction that philosophy “cannot claim the least superiority”²⁴⁷ over science and art. And this equalization of different modes of thought is perhaps most precisely grasped in *What is Philosophy?*, where all the three main domains of human activity (philosophy, science, art) are seen as similarly creative in plunging into chaos and returning with “bloodshot eyes,”²⁴⁸ bringing something back. But however Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that thinking “is thought through concepts, or functions, or sensations and no one of these thoughts is better than another,”²⁴⁹ they still seem to insist more on distinguishing between the tools of philosophy, art and science (only scientists, in the end, can tell us if they are in need of philosophy).²⁵⁰

²⁴² John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 99.

²⁴³ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 98.

²⁴⁴ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 52.

²⁴⁵ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 122. Emphasis added. Such thinking naturally brings up a question as to what this “turning into” should look like in practice. As much as it is clear that this movement is not about mere interdisciplinarity or cooperation, there are of course no specific guidelines for creating a “philo-fiction,” nor an existing set of examples, and it is not our aim here to invent one. However, we can say that for the needs of this text, it is perhaps better understood as a more abstract gesture – of “surrendering” and stepping outside of theoretical comfort zones, staying always, as Laruelle himself says “between.”

²⁴⁶ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p.

²⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition...*, p. xvi.

²⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?...*, p. 41.

²⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?...*, p. 198.

²⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?...*, p. 162.

Laruelle's collaboration with fiction is comparatively radical, as he assertively pronounces the wish to "make art with philosophy, to introduce or make a poetry of thought,"²⁵¹ which wouldn't need to be "made of concepts" and nor to put forward any "philosophical thesis," but which would help realize an act of making "*something* poetic with concepts. Thus, to create a practice that could destroy, in a certain way, the classical usage of philosophy."²⁵² There then seems to be a certain productive "poetics" at play, in Armen Avanessian's understanding of the word,²⁵³ that is inherent to fiction, which allows it to traverse discourses and disciplines with ease, flowing from one material into another, always changing languages, modes and expressions – a characteristic perhaps suitable of the kind of liquid non-knowledge we seek.

²⁵¹ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 29.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ See: Armen, Avanessian, *Overwrite: Ethics of Knowledge, Poetics of Existence*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017.

2.6. Transformative Poetics of Fiction

Fiction is in itself a radical subjectivity and must be recognized as an autonomous experience before giving rise to technologically produced effects.

– John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal*

Every act of writing is a sorcerous operation, a partisan action in a war.

– Ccru, *Lemurian Time War*

The stories we tell imply more than just their words.

– Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*

It is thus primarily in Laruillian terms that we understand also contemporary digital moving image fiction as a materially performative poetical force, not opposed to the Real but being “(in-)One” with it. Because such a fabulatory practice, as was explained, necessarily withdraws from any truth claims about both reality and fiction and becomes sort of an opaque, fast-shifting agency instead, moving across various fields, exceeding all designated areas and enacting a truly transversal movement – becoming thus an “overarching category for an equalizing approach to science, philosophy, art, and every discourse.”²⁵⁴

If we recall once more the emphasis on materiality expressed throughout the overview of both Laruelle’s and Deleuze’ (and Guattari’s) respective approaches, it shouldn’t be surprising that Laruelle understands philo-fiction more as “an experience” rather than a stable ontological position.²⁵⁵ Because, in the darkness of the Real, looking without sight, we can no longer rely on critical theoretical tools or representational categories, but must attempt to sense our immediate surroundings and experiment anew with every step we take. That could also explain why, as Laruelle claims elsewhere, artists could often be more sensitive to non-philosophy than philosophers themselves²⁵⁶ – as they are usually more trained in openness and sensibility toward both material and experience as sources of their reasoning and navigation.

²⁵⁴ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 133.

²⁵⁵ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 99.

²⁵⁶ John Mullarkey, Anthony Paul Smith (eds.), *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy...*, p. 247.

Smith further explains that, for Laruelle, fiction functions “as a force of insurrection that disempowers the world and operates without concern for its parameters.”²⁵⁷ The fiction, whether it is philo-fiction or any other-fiction,²⁵⁸ thus seems endowed with the power of demolishing the walls bifurcating our rigid mental constructions, and thus is perhaps able to let us feel a glimpse of what Laruelle calls the “emotion of the Universe”²⁵⁹ – something that cannot be seen or comprehended rationally, but which seems to be possibly “experienced” or felt.

This emphasis on experience takes us back also to the transformative potential of fiction for our own subjectivity, which – being crucially embroiled with lives and modes of existence of other natural and technical beings – is thereby understood as radically open to fiction’s trespassings, whereby it swallows pieces and spews them across different planes, without respect for any borders and boundaries. Echoing Deleuze’s and Guattari’s mention of “people to come,”²⁶⁰ O’Sullivan and Burrows thus underline that fiction, through a triad of what they call “mythopoesis, myth-science and mythotechnesis,”²⁶¹ actively works on construction of the “missing people” in Burrows’ and O’Sullivan’s understanding – viewers, spectators, readers and other human and non-human beings whose subjectivity is never fixed but always yet open to mutual co-shaping toward something else.²⁶² The very idea of the transformative becoming-with digital images and technologies, a belief that “something happens through”²⁶³ and (with)in digitally disseminated fiction, is of high importance for this text, as we shall see in more detail in the course of what follows.

But before we arrive there, it must be made clear that this thesis itself is of course not and could not be an attempt to directly practice anything close to non-philosophy (the tight formal requirements of the thesis format being just one of the reasons). What it takes for its own is its attitude toward fiction, treating it as real, materially productive “experience” stretching across different modes of expressions and thoughts. Because, as Burrows and O’Sullivan repeatedly mention, such understanding acknowledges fiction’s “traction on reality”²⁶⁴ as exceeding any singular work or object (of art) and underlines its “mythopoetic”

²⁵⁷ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 120.

²⁵⁸ Laruelle himself brings up a whole number of other fictions, for example “photo-fiction,” “christo-fiction,” ...

²⁵⁹ François Laruelle, *On the Black Universe...*, p. 103.

²⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*..., p. 109, p. 176.

²⁶¹ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 1.

²⁶² David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 17. But the idea of “missing people” is based on “people to come” (Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 345, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*..., p. 109, p. 176.)

²⁶³ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 17. Emphasis added

²⁶⁴ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 21.

quality as a “world-making” force constituted through and operating not only within art, philosophy or science, but also *between* them, sailing the fastest streams and channeling together diverse agents and forces.

As Smith also explains, for Laruelle, “the purpose of fiction is a kind of counter-creation,”²⁶⁵ or as Burrows and O’Sullivan have it, fictioning is always “disruptive of order” – an “intervention in, and augmentation of, existing reality.”²⁶⁶ Following also Deleuze’ and Guattari’s proclamation that “to create is to resist,”²⁶⁷ we want to treat digital moving image fiction as crucially participating in a performative molding of world-matter, asking what it is *doing* and what can it “*do*” as it keeps morphing around and through us with an ever-accelerating pace. As Maoilearca notes, Laruelle himself has described his work as a “rebellion-through-fiction” that can also be seen as an “invention of lived experience or of a life [that] takes . . . from thought’s point of view, the form of a theory-practice.”²⁶⁸ It is such “theory-practice” we see at play in the dark liquidity of the contemporary (art) world, and which we thus aim to articulate and deploy in attempt to at least *feel* the throbbing of its rhythm.

The present thesis thus understands the practice of fictioning as a necessarily post-genre and post-media materially productive poetics, not limited to either artistic or theoretical means, but necessarily evolving across “arts, sciences and social struggles.”²⁶⁹ Because “contemporary” (if we recall Schmid’s usage of the word) moving images, as well as other digital objects, are always being born in the twilight crossover areas of different thoughts-practices, at the blurry confluences of concepts, aesthetics and technologies, following the mutant shape-shifting fictions they co-produce might be one of our few chances to keep up.

Maoilearca writes, following Laruelle, that in terms of “behaviors or postures, even the hallucinations or fictions of philosophy are real. They become hyperfictions in the Real rather than fictions or parafictions *of* the unreal.”²⁷⁰ This reversal is crucial, as it expresses that intense fictionality – and here we re-connect the presented understanding of fiction with its proliferation described in the first chapter of this text – does not equal unreality, but on the contrary, a fuller, and we could perhaps argue, more fluid and mutable Real. Moreover, Laruelle’s understanding of fiction as a material and as “lived experience,”²⁷¹ “accessible to

²⁶⁵ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 119.

²⁶⁶ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*..., p. 110.

²⁶⁸ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 247.

²⁶⁹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus...*, p. 7.

²⁷⁰ John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 140.

²⁷¹ Robin Mackay, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided..., p. 24.

every [wo]man before its very usage under the technical conditions of literature, of art, of philosophy,”²⁷² offers us an interesting opportunity to partake. For exactly because it reaches “beyond any philosophical realism into a quasi-fictional, para-realism,”²⁷³ (philo-)fiction can be understood as a crucial “element of opening or of possibility of every thought.”²⁷⁴ But it is important to note, that despite all this, fiction is not utopian, transcendental, nor in any other sense a “way out.” It is not able to unveil for us the impenetrable darkness of the Real, just as it doesn’t make it darker. Even if we engage in fiction, everything stays unrepresentable and opaque. But – if we paraphrase Smith – how fiction lives and how it is “*performed*, does matter”²⁷⁵ – and it does so in the most material sense imaginable.

²⁷² François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univocal 2013, quoted in: John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 133.

²⁷³ Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 77.

²⁷⁴ François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univocal 2013, quoted in: John Ó Maoilearca, *All thoughts are equal...*, p. 134. Original emphasis removed.

²⁷⁵ Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought...*, p. 120. [The original quote does not talk about fiction but about performativity of human lives in the world].

3. CREATIVITY OF DIGITAL OBJECTS

*But who can say that the vapour engine has not a kind of consciousness?
Where does consciousness begin, and where end? Who can draw the line?
Who can draw any line? Is not everything interwoven with everything?
Is not machinery linked with animal life in an infinite variety of ways?*

– Samuel Butler, Erewhon

Having sketched out the technical and societal (and consequently also artistic) context this text is being written in, as well as having outlined some more general theoretical standpoints it arises from, we shall now proceed to what could be considered a more “practical” part of the thesis. This is being pronounced with slight reluctance, as one of the aims so far was to underline that especially under all aforementioned conditions of the “post-contemporary,” the very distinction between theory and practice needs to be, for multiple reasons, repeatedly put into question. The following chapter is thus *functionally* more practice-oriented by utilizing approaches that directly refer to and grow out of “real-world” practices and technologies, as well as in attempting to bring on board some examples from contemporary moving image art practice in course of chapters 3. 2. and 3. 3. Localizing them wholly on an intersection converging both theory and practice, making theory with them, or even making art with theory, as Laruelle would demand, is too big of a goal for a master’s thesis. Nevertheless, I believe that the preceding chapters, the following definition of contemporary works of moving image art through the concept of the “digital object,” and also the overall way this text interacts with such objects and places itself (as well as human beings in general) within their trajectories, will help to underline agency, relationality and even certain autonomy, which demands breaking away from the idea of critical visual analysis which would be reducing multifaceted digital objects to mere reflective “images of the world” or individual “artworks” interpretable through personal or even contextual intentions of a respective artist. In this sense, this chapter (and the whole present thesis) is not even interested in art in terms of traditional art-related categories – what it seeks instead is to treat digital moving images traversing contemporary art as sort of an exploratory “grey zone” of human-machine interaction, which allows us to follow how digital objects exist or even live, and thus hopefully help us to better understand how we mutually relate amidst our ever-accelerating co-evolution with(in) the technics.

3.1. On the (Onto)genesis of Digital Technical Objects

*Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions;
rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.*

– Karen Barad, Meeting The Universe Halfway:
Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning

We have already stated at the end of the first chapter that this thesis understands moving images (of contemporary art) rather as “digital objects” than mere “images.” What will now follow is the carving out of the concept of the “digital object,” which seems to offer a crucial alternative challenging the many thorny connotations of “image” already partly problematized in the previous chapters – especially its pre-supposed flatness, the lingering idea of derivative nature of technical images as constituted through the history of analogue photography and film, as well as assumed immateriality of images proliferating on our screens.

3.1.1. In Search of the Digital Object

Humans have always lived in a hybrid environment surrounded by artificial and natural objects. The artificial and the natural are not two separate realms, nor are artificial objects simply instruments with which to conquer the natural; instead, they constitute a dynamic system that conditions human experience and existence.

– Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*

3.1.1.1. Defining the Technical Object

There is something alive in a technical ensemble.

– Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

Already in 1958, French philosopher Gilbert Simondon published a book called *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* in which he accuses “culture” of being ignorant toward “the meaning of technical objects.”²⁷⁶ What he primarily criticizes is the narrow conception of human “culture”– which, as Jane Bennett remarks, is “not our own making”²⁷⁷ anyways – constituting itself “as a defense system against technics” and presenting this defense as “a defense of man,” presuming that “technical objects do not contain a human reality within them.”²⁷⁸ As he further explains, culture “behaves toward the technical object as [wo]man toward a stranger, when [s]he allows [her/him]self to be carried away by primitive xenophobia,”²⁷⁹ rejecting a reality that might seem “strange” or “foreign” to human understanding, but which needs to be granted the same rights for recognition we grant to ourselves or the attention paid to the natural world.

Because, as Simondon attempts to explain, the whole “opposition drawn between culture and technics, between man and machine, is false and has no foundation,” being “merely a sign of ignorance or resentment.”²⁸⁰ Long before any discussions about

²⁷⁶ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing 2017, p. 15.

²⁷⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press 2009, p.115.

²⁷⁸ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 15. [We follow the usage of “technics” instead of “technology / technologies.” There is multitude of approaches to how to distinguish these two, but as the translators of the book note, “the latter refers to the almost ineffably practical and particular application of technics to a given concrete task” and seem therefore less suitable for our purposes.]

²⁷⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 16.

²⁸⁰ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p.15.

posthumanism emerged, he thus urges us to “to discover the foreign or strange as human”²⁸¹ and re-create the concept of culture in a way in which it would grant access also to machines as the strangers inside whom “something human is locked up, misunderstood, materialized, enslaved.”²⁸² (Albeit the “human” here has to be understood more in context of ascribing human rights and values, than simply anthropomorphizing technical beings – something Simondon himself avoids carefully.) He doesn’t hesitate to even compare the task of incorporating “technical *beings*” into our conception of culture to “the abolition of slavery and the affirmation of the value of the human person.”²⁸³ Even though Simondon mostly refers to artefacts of technical origin as “objects,” the noun “beings” he uses to describe them in the very first paragraph of the book deserves to be strongly emphasized, as it elegantly points to his view of technics as having certain agency, if not directly a life of their own.

Technical objects thus play their role far beyond the lines we have written for them. As the title of the book itself has it – they have a “mode of existence,” a reality that needs to be recognized and cannot be reduced to either objects of human knowledge, belonging thus to science, or the role they play in human experience, as for example traditional phenomenological philosophy would treat them. Simondon’s work in this sense is almost taxonomical, focusing on technical objects *themselves*, giving attention and care to seemingly minor technical particles and mechanical advancements and tracing their own “individualization”²⁸⁴ toward the next evolutionary stage – almost as if they were animal species. This aspect is not accidental, as Simondon shows through his idea of technical objects’ concretization. As he writes, we are often making the mistake of seeing a technical object as “an artificial being,”²⁸⁵ something we have simply made and since then it is “done,” a primitive one-ended product “without common ground of existence, without reciprocal causality, without internal resonance,”²⁸⁶ fully dependent on a “regulative external milieu”²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 16.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p.15.

²⁸⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 59. Simondon distinguishes between individuation and individualization, the former being used in broader terms of transindividuation, including the psychic processes, the latter more specifically in the context of technical development of objects. (This is something Yuk Hui comments on, asking whether we could not also discuss the “individuation” of technical, or in his context, digital objects. (See: Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2016, p. 55.) But these two processes are not at all mutually exclusive – on the contrary, they can be seen as “a mixture of the two.” (See: Gilbert Simondon, *L’Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information* Grenoble: Millon 2005 in Couze Venn, Individuation, relationality, affect: rethinking the human in relation to the living. *Subjectivity* 13, 60–88 (2020). Accessible at WWW: <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-020-00091-z>> [published 10. 4. 2020])

²⁸⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. xv.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 50.

of a laboratory or a factory it was born in. But technical objects are neither static, nor substantial or complete. And as Simondon shows, they cannot be conceived as isolated either. Because throughout its evolution, a technical object continually “frees itself,” “dynamically incorporates the laboratory”²⁸⁸ into its functions, and becomes more complex and multifunctional – each structure existing “not only as organ, but as body, as milieu, and as ground for other structures.”²⁸⁹ This observation has quite serious consequences, making Simondon state that during the process of concretization, even formerly perhaps primitively artificial object becomes increasingly “similar to a natural object”²⁹⁰ and as such deserves the same amount of awareness and interest we give to animals or plants.

Simondon’s notion of the “milieu,”²⁹¹ a many faceted word translatable from French as both “environment” and a “middle,” thus grasps nicely the scale of both the conditions under which the technical object evolves, and the perspective from which we must approach it if we are to be able to at least partially glimpse into this process. Because what allows a technical object to concretize itself and develop further is primarily “its relation to other technical and natural objects,”²⁹² including but not limited to humans. This is also why, as he reminds, the re-integration of technical beings into culture could not be realized “at the level of elements or at the level of individuals” but necessarily “at the level of ensembles,” as the most complex organization of agents in the system.²⁹³ On such wider scale, the technical realm thus has a structure “that has the same status as a natural structure, even if it might be schematically different from all natural structures.”²⁹⁴ As Simondon explains, we unjustly tend to understand technical objects in terms of “use,” as “pure assemblages of matter,”²⁹⁵ evaluable simply through their “utility function,”²⁹⁶ which necessarily prevents us from paying attention to the complexity of the whole technical structure, its entanglement with other structures and neither its actual influence on the ways we ourselves constitute meaning and make sense of the world.

What has Simondon importantly named even back then, is the radical inseparability of lives and evolutionary processes of human and the machine. And this inescapable embroilment seems to have only grown ever since, making even more apparent that technics

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. xv.

²⁹⁰ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 50.

²⁹¹ Articulated through the whole book and distinguished into several types.

²⁹² Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 50.

²⁹³ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. xvi. [Simondon distinguishes, from smaller to larger, elements, individuals and ensembles]

²⁹⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 50

²⁹⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 17. Original emphasis removed.

²⁹⁶ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 16.

have influence on our own development whether we want to acknowledge it or not. By “banish[ing]”²⁹⁷ technical objects from “human” culture and ignoring the specific mode of existence of technical beings, we thus cease to understand not only the world of technical objects, but in the same manner also our very own selves (the human reality “locked up” within the realm of technics). The result of this is something that resonates within philosophy at least since it started to speak of industrial revolution, only gaining in importance with accelerating automatization, and which was famously explored among others by Karl Marx or Martin Heidegger – the problem of alienation. Both Marx and Heidegger, on different levels, importantly point to the danger of the alienation of (wo)man from technics, which becomes one of the key characteristics of the modern world. In his famous 1954 essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger observes that in the modern world, the traditional understanding of technology as *technē* – linked by the Greeks to craft and the arts and thus seen as having productively poetic or revealing qualities, is replaced by “Gestell,”²⁹⁸ a purpose-oriented “enframing,” which becomes the new essence of technology. What he thus calls for is for the original revealing quality of technology to be recognized, instead of it being reduced to mere means of exploitation of the world.²⁹⁹ But Simondon approaches the problem from a yet different, less hierarchical and more processual angle, showing that alienation is caused neither by technics as such, nor by their detachment from some original human nature,³⁰⁰ but by our lack of knowledge and understanding of “the nature of machines, of their mutual relations and of their relations with man, and of the values implied in these relations.”³⁰¹

And it is exactly these processual, mutually shaped relations we seek to underline also in the context of contemporary moving image art, following Simondon’s in many ways forward-thinking notion of technical object – something even nowadays often overlooked as mere means or medium – as being increasingly present, active and productive in almost every domain of human life. As Simondon emphasizes, the necessary “broadening and

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger: *The Question Concerning Technology*, 1954. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil394/The%20Question%20Concerning%20Technology.pdf>> [publication date unknown, accessed 23.8. 2020].

²⁹⁹ Heidegger’s thesis is of course way more complicated, but not central to what we are trying to form here.

³⁰⁰ Susana Lindberg summarizes that Simondon criticizes Heidegger for thinking technology only in terms of “Zeug” (a thing or gear) and Marx for reducing it to “work.” Susana Lindberg, *Being with Technique—Technique as being-with: The technological communities of Gilbert Simondon*. *Contemporary Philosophy Review* 52, 299–310 (2019). Accessible at WWW: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-019-09466-9>> [published 8. 6. 2019, accessed 16. 7. 2021]

³⁰¹ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects...*, p. 19.

deepening”³⁰² of culture can actually lead to changes of high “political and social” importance, but for such changes to be undertaken, we need a culture (in Simondonian understanding of the word as “knowledge” and “a sense of values”) that would be “adequate to the reality which it expresses and regulates”³⁰³ – a truly contemporary culture recognizing technical agents in their full autonomy, mutability and importance for the milieu we constitute.

3.1.1.2. Defining the Digital Object

The introduction and convergence of technologies like Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, and GPS allow for more accurate contextual and geographical detections, leading us into the REAL.

How can we address this digital milieu? It is another world, a strange world, one that is simultaneously artificial and natural. It is as complicated as what we used to refer to as the “real world,” and more important, it is a world we are already in.

– Yuk Hui, On the Existence of Digital Objects

Simondon’s approach to technical objects as never complete and undergoing constant reshaping of course by its very nature demands actualization, as the means of what is “adequate” necessarily change. The technical milieu we live in today differs radically not only from that of the end of the 1950s, but even from a mere 15 years ago – it has become digital and omnipresent, to an extent probably unimaginable for anybody in Simondon’s time. As digital technologies become more and more integrated into previously simply mechanical objects, such as telephones and TVs, but also cars, fridges, kettles, thermostats, vacuum cleaners or even clothes, we must conclude that today it is almost impossible to properly theorize Simondonian technical objects without understanding them also as digital objects. In *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, referring directly to Simondon’s book, Chinese philosopher of technology Yuk Hui takes Simondon’s major concepts, such as that of the technical object, the milieu, and the process of concretization and individuation, and reshapes them for contemporary digitally networked world.

Hui offers to define “digital objects” as such that “take shape on a screen or hide in the back end of a computer program,” being “composed of data and metadata regulated by

³⁰² Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects...*, p. 20.

³⁰³ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects...*, p. 21.

structures or schemas.”³⁰⁴ As he himself points out, in computation, metadata are also called “*ontologies* – a word that has immediate associations with philosophy.”³⁰⁵ Seemingly perhaps too easy of a double-meaning, this sentence points to something crucial about the “new form of industrial object”³⁰⁶ crossing every aspect of our lives in the form of “online videos, images, text files, Facebook profiles,”³⁰⁷ Instagram posts, Tik Toks and many others. As Hui explains, in similarity to the emphasis Simondon puts on other-than-scientific understanding of technics, engineering often “falls short” when trying to grasp such objects, because it limits them “to a set of structures for representation,”³⁰⁸ seeing only their practical applications. There thus seems to be a need for certain deeper and less utilitarian “investigation” in computation which, according to Hui, has itself “a reciprocal relation” with philosophy – a need for a different ontology able to express the “digital milieu.”³⁰⁹ Because since ontology is in general questioning “being,” it can never grasp present reality “if it does not take into account the nature of technics” – “ontology is [thus] necessarily technical.”³¹⁰ And if philosophy wants to develop such ontology, it is not enough to “add one more branch” to itself but, as Hui classifies Simondon’s task, to “reestablish the metaphysical foundation of philosophy as a whole”³¹¹ or as he proposes himself, to “find a new relation between object and mind.”³¹²

As was already outlined in the first chapter of this text, it might at first seem contradictory to speak about “objects” in the context of happenings and interactions unfolding on digital screens, consisting of pixels and to-human-eyes invisible signals. As Hui provocatively asks: “Where is the digital object?”³¹³ Such a simplistic question becomes immediately more complicated, as the digital object cannot be constrained “inside” of any single computer and neither simply stored on a cloud, or even in several data storage buildings somewhere in cold North. It is instead, as Steyerl notices about the internet, “anywhere and nowhere” at the same time. Understanding digital media in terms of digital objects and their evolution, or “ontogenesis,” is thus marked by a crucial task of naming

³⁰⁴ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 1.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 2.

³⁰⁸ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 3.

³⁰⁹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 26.

³¹⁰ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 105.

³¹¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 12.

³¹² Yuk Hui, What is a Digital Object? *METAPHILOSOPHY*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2012, p. 390.

³¹³ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 110.

something that is “never fully known,”³¹⁴ and that we, on epistemological level, sometimes even “don’t know to exist,”³¹⁵ but which, as we have repeatedly shown, has in fact its own kind of heavy “irreducible”³¹⁶ physicality. Hui thus directly writes that computation “relies on a new type of materiality that disrupts some of the concepts that are fundamental to philosophy,”³¹⁷ challenging thus the very categories we have delineating matter or object in the first place. What he thereby also criticizes is repeatedly problematized immateriality of digital media, emphasizing that information consists of much more than “simply bits and bytes.”³¹⁸ Following Simondon, he underlines that information is not an “abstract entity” existing “outside of materiality” and suggests that we should understand “the nature of data *as objects*.”³¹⁹

Such objects, active in what we can now call, together with Hui and Simondon, a “digital milieu,”³²⁰ are thus necessarily different from how philosophy usually understood them, as they are objects of neither “experience nor of intuition,”³²¹ being often ungraspable, unlocalizable or, as Hui remarks in his definition, “hiding” behind graphic interfaces or composed of multiple layers across different spaces. But as Hui claims, they nevertheless are objects in terms of how we deal with them as well as being materially present outside of what we usually see as the “virtual world,”³²² leading us always “into the REAL.”³²³ Updating Simondon’s understanding of technical objects’ development, Hui thus observes how digital objects evolve, or concretize, across digital networks, stating that web ontologies are in fact “productive,”³²⁴ undergoing a constant reciprocal “double movement” consisting of “*objectification of data*” and “*dataification of objects*.”³²⁵ This is why data are not abstract information, and also why digital objects cannot be understood in terms of substance, appearance or any other traditional object-related category,³²⁶ being always related to yet another layer which cannot be simply seen or captured (hence the “hiding” Hui speaks of).

³¹⁴ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*..., p. 39.

³¹⁵ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 78.

³¹⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*..., p. 36.

³¹⁷ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 3.

³¹⁸ Yuk Hui, What is a Digital Object?..., p. 381.

³¹⁹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 27. Emphasis added.

³²⁰ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 26.

³²¹ Bernard Stiegler, Foreword, In: Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. xi.

³²² Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 48.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 34.

³²⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

³²⁶ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 2.

By their very nature, digital objects are thus “utterly relational,”³²⁷ taking shape through “establishing material connections over a broader milieu across further platforms and interfaces.”³²⁸ As Hui explains, contrary to the hypertext age, when online objects were meaningful only to humans and not to machines,³²⁹ contemporary web ontologies enable “machines to understand and manipulate data,”³³⁰ making them increasingly capable to “reason about them.”³³¹ This claim is not supposed to advocate for any machinic singularity utopia or dystopia, but explains something already practically present in our everyday movements on the web or in mobile applications, which become ever more “AI-motivated”³³² and filled with objects, composed of either text, image or other media, “not limited to human understanding” and “requiring machine interpretation.”³³³ In the same breath we more and more make sense of the world through exactly such machine-driven and machine-influenced processes, being offered content, shown images or suggested tips based on algorithmic evaluation – the very word processor I write in trying to presume (often unsolicited) corrections as I type. As Hui thus concludes, we are “living in a digital milieu; we Facebook, we blog, we Flickr, we YouTube, and we Vimeo. Nouns and brands have become verbs, even forms of life.”³³⁴ And such a milieu must be better grasped as “collaborative imagination of minds and machines” in one interconnected ensemble, than in terms of any simple instrumentality or domination. It is a reciprocal relation operating on such a scale that, as Hui observes, computation is not only irreducible to the mere question of mediation of content, but is itself “no less philosophical than philosophy” while concurrently “philosophy is no less technological.”³³⁵ This reciprocal relation applies to the bond between digital images we encounter while scrolling down the feed and the “real” world outside of the frame of the screen (at least in a given moment), but is also expressive of an ongoing ontogenesis of contemporary moving image art (the fact that these two categories are rarely not overlapping in terms of how we encounter them speaks for itself), as it is being increasingly tied to computational algorithmic processes in all stages of its existence: from initial research and influences to actual production and subsequent dissemination. A digital milieu is thus not

³²⁷ Bernard Stiegler, Foreword, In: Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. ix.

³²⁸ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., pp. 69–70.

³²⁹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 52.

³³⁰ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 68.

³³¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 69.

³³² Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 71.

³³³ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 72.

³³⁴ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 47.

³³⁵ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 50.

something we choose to enter or decide to reflect upon, but as Hui himself says – “it is a world we are already *in*.”³³⁶

³³⁶ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 48.

3.1.3. “What Invents Who:” The Organs of Cognition

[Are] we their parasites? [Are] they ours?

– Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones*

Having outlined that what we understand by “digital objects” and their autonomous “mode of existence” (at least to the extent that ours can be also considered as such) we now need to make a crucial connection back to human consciousness and to name our own role within the ensembles of technical beings. Bernard Stiegler places Simondon’s theory of individuation at the very heart of his philosophy, focusing on the role of technology in the wider development of human perception, consciousness, and memory. Such re-centering is crucial for this text, as it directly addresses the transfers between what we understand as human subjects and not only generally technical but specifically audiovisual technologies.

Stiegler uses Simondon’s idea of mutual coevolution of man and technics to re-think the relationship between humans and what is usually perceived as “their tools.” He refuses to see technical “artefacts” as simply an external influence on our physical and mental processes and advocates for such a conception and scale of our interactions with technics, which would allow to partially dissolve the very boundary between “human” and “technical,” understanding them instead as interconnected “organs” in one body-system stretched across both space and time. Following the observations of French anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler refutes the nobility of human intellect as a necessary source of invention of all technologies, showing that it is the very evolution of our mental abilities that was first enabled by the usage of technological artefacts – “the *what* invents the *who* just as much as it is invented by it.”³³⁷ What he therein puts into question is the very origin of technics as being simply born at the hands of [wo]man, understanding the technical “exteriorization” not as a conscious act of intelligent human beings, but as actually “constitutive of the life of the [human] spirit.”³³⁸ As another French philosopher Anne Alombert working with Stiegler summarizes: “[Wo]man and technics mutually co-invent each other within the same co-evolutionary processes between psycho-somatic (called natural) and artificial organs, to which it would be illusory to assign any origin.”³³⁹ Such observations necessarily result in a radical

³³⁷ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*. California: Stanford University Press 1998, p. 177.

³³⁸ Anne Alombert: *Penser la forme technique de la vie : du transhumanisme à l’organologie*. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.academia.edu/36941531/Penser_la_forme_technique_de_la_vie_du_transhumanisme_%C3%A0_lorganologie> [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 1. 2021].

³³⁹ Ibid.

decentering of the human subject as the inventor of the machines, suggesting not only that “there was therefore no human spirit at the origin of technological inventions”³⁴⁰ but also that the emergence of human intelligence itself could have happened beyond our intentions or even out of our focus. More radically put – we might be nothing more than a “secretion of artificial organs.”³⁴¹

Expanding thus on Simondon’s concept of individuation, Stiegler develops the concept of “transindividuation” to describe the co-evolutionary process of ongoing exchange between human beings and technological artefacts, which in many ways surpasses even the physical boundaries of human body. This view is important as it contradicts the very common tendency in theorizing technology, seeing humans as relating to the world “through objects,” using technological artefacts “to stretch the spatiality of their bodies,”³⁴² the human being seen as “extended”³⁴³ by the artefacts in, in a very physical sense of certain augmentation, which is an often view of many post-phenomenological or science and technology approaches to technology, but plays a crucial role in the problematic idea of transhumanism. But Stieglerian perspective rejects such an approach to technical “artefacts” as simple man-made “prostheses.” Because neither technical nor biological organs could be thought apart from their mutual transindividuation, there is, as Anne Alombert points out, “no human *nature* which could be augmentable by the technical prostheses.”³⁴⁴ The technological artefacts therefore don’t “extend” our cognitive or bodily capacities, precisely because such never existed as unextended (or we could say, unmediated) in the first place – “the augmentation has always already begun.”³⁴⁵

Such an “organological” approach thus crucially problematizes what is usually considered as natural and artificial, but first and foremost, it challenges the very idea of technical objects as “tools” for mere human usage. Compared for example to Heidegger’s often-used concept of *Zuhandenheit*, describing tools as “ready-to-hand”³⁴⁶ objects existing for us as something to be used, Simondonian (and Stieglerian) perspective is less hierarchical and anthropocentric. Even though Yuk Hui is more positive about the concept of *Zuhandenheit*, explaining that it attempts to prove certain modes of existence of objects apart

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do. Philosophical reflections on technology, agency, and design*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2005, p. 124.

³⁴³ Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do...*, p. 125.

³⁴⁴ Anne Alombert: *Penser la forme technique de la vie...*

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger: *The Question Concerning Technology...*

from our conscious signification (we don't need "a representation of the hammer as a collection of attributes when it uses it to hit the nail"),³⁴⁷ it must thus still be noted that it establishes and replicates a quite one-sided relationship of humans *to* technics and thereby presents the existence of technical objects as human-made and human-related.

Oppositely, Stiegler's concept of technological artefact is very distant from the idea of a tool. Viewed as organs, technical objects are, as was already presented, themselves co-constitutive of the world and of ourselves and their status could never simply be that of a tool at our hand, precisely because we can't be sure whether it's (wo)man who invented the tool or the tool who invented (wo)man: "the relation between human organism and its prostheses is a transductive relation."³⁴⁸ This uncertainty about the actual direction of interconnected evolutions of humans and technics is mentioned already in Simondon, when he writes that it is perhaps not the machines that are increasingly taking over formerly human manual labour, but it might have been humans who took over theirs, while they, for a certain period of time, "provisionally replaced the machine[s] before truly technical individuals could emerge."³⁴⁹ This possibility is taken to a certain extreme in a Victorian novel *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, which, under the influence of Darwinian evolutionary theory, includes a story about autonomous locomotives that use symbiosis with humans only to evolve themselves³⁵⁰ – a situation which would make humans a kind of artefacts of machines.

³⁴⁷ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 99.

³⁴⁸ Anne Alombert: *Penser la forme technique de la vie...*

³⁴⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *On The Mode of Existence of Technical Objects...*, p. 81.

³⁵⁰ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, Dover Publications, Inc. 2002 (1872).

3.1.3. Mutual Ontogenesis

[O]ne doesn't construct oneself a network.

– Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

Nothing makes itself.

– Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

Stiegler also directly applies the above-explained reasoning to new media, from early auditive ones, through cinema and television to contemporary digital networks, showing how human cognition itself is not only changed but in fact constituted through sounds and images. He expands Husserl's idea of primary and secondary retention, which explain how we remember and recall past moments with a third category of "tertiary retention." While the primary retention allows us to keep in memory the just-passed previous moments and thus to perceive objects in time (to, for example, even make sense of a melody as a whole), and the secondary serves to recall things from memory, tertiary retentions are "hypomnesic sedimentations that have accumulated over generations by spatializing and materializing themselves in the world of artefacts."³⁵¹

It is because of these tertiary retentions that nothing as unmediated experience (or non-augmented human nature) could exist – because the experience and the mental capacities themselves are being layered and (trans)formed not only in our physical brains, but also in sounds and images of the media. The whole transindividuation could thus be also explained as sort of a "long-circuit" of flowing exchange between different bodies and organs – a kind of entangled massive "collective memory"³⁵² processually constituted across both "natural" and "artificial" beings-organs.

Such open and unstable arrangement is of course always undergoing transformation, in which, as Stiegler notes, the "I" and "Other" themselves are in fact just "two faces of the same process of individuation, at the core of which develops their tendency to become-indivisible."³⁵³ Or as theorist Patricia MacCormack has it: "the space *between* the I / Other is one of inevitable connection and we are always and already othered / otherable."³⁵⁴ Such underlining of the incompleteness as well as of the importance of mutual co-constitution in the space "between," in many ways breaks down the conception of individual agents acting in

³⁵¹ Anne Alombert: *Penser la forme technique de la vie...*

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009, p. 4, Original emphasis removed.

³⁵⁴ Patricia MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics*, p. 6.

the world, supporting Donna Haraway's sympoetical claim that "to be one is always to become with many."³⁵⁵ Because from this perspective, our own making is always already enmeshed in other making-withs, machinic and natural, whether we consciously admit or not. Similarly, the "intra" in Karen Barad's aforementioned concept of "intra-action" aims to emphasize, in contrast to the concept of "interaction" between two separate individual agencies, exactly this entanglement and mutual inseparability, in which agents are definable only in and through the processes they engage in: "they don't exist as individual elements."³⁵⁶ This of course echoes also Spinoza's much earlier understanding of the body as a composition of relations,³⁵⁷ which seem to have only gain on truthfulness as we become more and more literally pierced with microplastic particles and signal waves.

In our inherently bio-mechanical existence in such "posthuman digital universe,"³⁵⁸ there is thus no clear differentiating line between the "master" and the "tool," everything being irrevocably subjected to a "widespread practice of mutual contamination between organic matter — anthropomorphic or not — and electronic circuitry."³⁵⁹ This has of course radical implications for the role digital media plays in reshaping of human subjectivity, supplementing, as Hui explains, "the finitude of the first two kinds of retention with an infinite repertoire of memories, made possible by digitization."³⁶⁰ But contemporary algorithmic processes go way farther beyond capturing "our" memories or even simply "memories" in terms of what already *has been*. And if we want to tap into these non-linear and ungraspable flows that nevertheless necessarily reshape our very cognition and consciousness, we must stop approaching them from a position of domination, reducing them to tools-instruments and limiting thereby the meaning and scale of their operations to our self-centered anthropocentric projections – not only because we perhaps haven't really invented them, but because even if we did, nowadays they have without any doubt become too "alive" for their "mode of existence" to be overlooked.

As both Simondon and Hui express, if technical beings are often unacknowledged from those in positions of either practical users or engineers, we perhaps need to look elsewhere "to discover a new sensibility for being with objects enabled by technologies,"³⁶¹

³⁵⁵ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2008, p. 4. Original emphasis removed.

³⁵⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting The Universe Halfway*, p. 33. Original emphasis removed.

³⁵⁷ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions 2001.

³⁵⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. Oxford – Malden: Polity Press 2013, p. 113.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Yuk Hui, What is a Digital Object? *METAPHILOSOPHY*, Vol. 43, No. 4, July 2012, p. 392.

³⁶¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 38.

which could help us introduce contemporary digital objects into our culture and thus mitigate the “alienation within the digital milieu,”³⁶² tangible through the widespread feelings of unreality, misunderstanding and information and sensory overload so ubiquitous in digital globalized world.

The moving image works referenced in following two sub-chapters can thus be understood as attempts to nurture such sensibility, salving the “circuits” of mutual interaction, and giving either by their content or in the course of their creative process, space to digital beings as inseparable agents living with us in one shared milieu. There are of course more possibilities for creation of such moments of mutuality, but because of its dependence on digital technologies, certain areas of contemporary moving image art seem to be a good space for exercising such dialogue. A dialogue in which it would be possible to reshape the problematic idea of a tool to more reality-corresponding ends (especially in the context of contemporary digital images), finding thereby an exit from notions of tools-instruments to something we might perhaps call tools-collaborators, tools-co-creators or maybe even tools-“companions” (in Haraway’s understanding).³⁶³ Let us say it is an unsure experiment in what we might call, following Burrow’s and O’Sullivan’s reading of Laruelle, a “retooling”—an attempt to look for other-than-possessive and necessary more-than-human configurations of human-machine interaction in shifting flows of material fictions crossing through moving images of contemporary art.

³⁶² Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 53.

³⁶³ A word Haraway uses across different books. See for example: Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London/Durham: Duke University Press 2016.

3.2. Digital Objects in Contemporary Moving Image Art

The very possibility of “culture,” and thus of “spirit,” relies on technics.

– Bernard Stiegler,
Technics and Time 3, Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise

Now might be the right time for a little summary. After submerging ourselves into fiction as a real fluid force operating ubiquitously in the contemporary global digital network-world, we have consecutively laid out, from a more philosophical viewpoint, an understanding of its materially productive performativity. Last, we have roughly sculpted a figuration of technical agents co-producing the digital milieu as partially autonomous digital objects, or even digital beings, who are in themselves generative and directly co-constitutive of our everyday world and the many fictions at play within it, challenging thus also many older conceptualizations of both space and time. As was repeatedly expressed, they therefore don't function as mere passive containers for our own memories or projections, but directly influence human cognitive and affective capacities on a very physical level, shaping not only human–human mediated interaction, but increasingly adding more layers of human–machine, machine–human and importantly machine–machine communication into the process.

It was thus hopefully made clear why digital images cannot be treated in a representational manner, with respect to how they carry, transform and create meanings (which we can access), but also, and perhaps even more importantly, because they are in fact material objects with physical “traction on reality”³⁶⁴— highly active agents in a shared digital-material milieu. The rest of this chapter will focus on the above-mentioned retooling (both in the more abstract and the literal meaning of the word) observable in some of the fluid digital images thriving in contemporary moving image art practice. But it is also important to note that even when focusing specifically on moving images, we must always bear in mind the “post-” context of contemporary art, which without hesitation crosses the frame of media specificity and – when presented in an exhibition format – floods the room with other objects or on the other hand, uses the moving image only as one part of the larger process or installation.

³⁶⁴ David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 21.

The examples³⁶⁵ to follow are not connected by much more than their existence in the contemporary art world and by the fact that they are “digital images” in terms of the creative tools they couple with. The videos are thus not understood simply as a collection of artworks awaiting interpretation, which would uncover the intentions of individual artists or specific formal features or methods (in which case they vary greatly). Instead, they are woven into the fabric of the text through diverse images, matters and themes, in order to help us show something broader about contemporary digital ontology, whose materiality and affectivity they can be said to channel, but which radically overruns any singular (digital) object, specific aesthetic tendency or even human intention in general. This broadening elseways allows for a productive narrowing, calling our attention specifically to the range of possibilities of digital fictioning – in Burrows’ and O’Sullivan’s understanding of it as of “production of a different mode of being”³⁶⁶ – following the imagery and imaginary of their image-streams. Approaching images which are distinguished by elusiveness, diffraction, mutation, and changeability with this intent seems to be the right step, as it allows us to treat the “artworks” in the same way they treat their images – cutting stable units into pieces and morphing them into something that is always different and irreducible to any recombination of previous parts, or even sculpting them out of nowhere, eluding any stable categorization or preexisting certainty. In this sense, we seem to be beyond Simondonian taxonomy, leaving the herbarium at home and turning into bloodshot-eyed storm-chasers. And dealing with such image-whirls, we can never be sure who is the hunter and who is the hunted.

³⁶⁵ Ranging from already iconic works, sometimes presented at the most important Biennales, to way lesser-known projects, it is thus by no mistake an all-encompassing or carefully enclosed selection, being treated more as (partly necessarily subjective) group of cases in point (and at the same time sources of inspiration) or enactings of the main theoretical strings we have stretch(ed).

³⁶⁶ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 18.

3.2.1. Liquid Opacity of Digital Fiction

We thought it was a plumbing system, so how did this tsunami creep up in my sink?

– Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?*

"It's 21st century... It's the fucking 21st century"

– Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen (2014)

There is an eerie-feeling and somewhat surprisingly melancholic scene³⁶⁷ in Ryan Trecartin's and Lizzie Fitch's *Mark Trade* (2016), in which the protagonist Mark, played by porn actor Murphy Maxwell, and a female-dressed figure with gray-painted face performed by Trecartin himself, sit on an inflatable circle floating on a completely black borderless water, whose horizon is swallowed by thick darkness of the surrounding night (**Figure 4**). Everybody seems to have been heavily drinking for hours (as well as throughout the whole movie) spiraling more and more into hallucinatory drunkenness, falling in and crawling fumblingly back from the water (—and isn't, as Deleuze and Guattari note, "[d]runkenness [...] a triumphant irruption of the plant in us"?). The unheroic atmosphere of lostness strengthened by weirdly saddening tones reminiscent of lost summer days, the scene is in many ways expressive of what we have so far described about the qualities inherent to contemporary digital ontology, as well as of the whole cinematic style of the films of Trecartin and Fitch. All protagonists seem to ramble without any legible meaning and continuity, the lines often losing sense in the middle of the sentence, mixing two or more statements that sometimes sound as if they were cut out of completely different scripts. *Mark Trade* along with other videos created by the two – most notably *Centre Jenny* (2013) – features weirdly costumed protagonists with face paints and contact lenses, evoking a disjointedly (un)human origin, chaotically acting out roles, genders and situations while tirelessly shooting their surroundings with multiple cameras. The text will come back to some specific cinematic strategies they employ in the next chapter (3.3), but we have opened the present part with this image, because it captures a specific impression of volatile disorientation of vision that is perhaps more of a non-vision or, in Trecartin's style, a "night vision."³⁶⁸ While watching, we seem to be losing track of any

³⁶⁷ As hard as it is to even select distinguished "scenes" in Trecartin's and Fitch's movies, the part where they come to the lake starts around the 41st minute. The video is accessible online on Trecartin's Vimeo. Accessible at WWW: <<https://vimeo.com/200299829>>

³⁶⁸ The mention of "night vision" plays a quite central role also for example in *Centre Jenny* and *Comma Boat*. There was even a limited number of "Witness Night Vision 360" sweatshirts sold through Dis magazine website. Accessible at WWW: <<https://disown.dismagazine.com/products/witness-night-vision-360>>

logic and navigation somewhere in between of thick layers of merged and collaged images (shot often – and in case of some other Trecartin’s movies, exclusively – at night or with a green-light night vision mode) continually put on top of another, next to each other, or inserted into each other, while being at the same time slowed down or sped up and accompanied by stretched tones and autotuned voices, echoing the biggest trend in pop and rap music of the past decade.

These heavily post-produced alien images and sounds make tangible the intensity and confusion so typical of today’s ultra-mediated sensory overload amidst which we become, as Steyerl has it, “floaters in a fleeting world of images, interns in dark net soap lands.”³⁶⁹ (And as we might have noticed, not only Instagram or Facebook Messenger, but even Microsoft Word processor now has a “dark” mode.) Shaviro explains that such fluidity and disorientation is typical of “post-cinematic” media regime, because mutable and highly affect-saturated digital images bring altogether different relations to both time and space. While the classical cinema was always presupposing some real physical space preceding it (as much as it could have been a semi-fictional space created by a sum of different places), presenting us with certain “continuity in space and movement,” digital cinema, as Shaviro writes, “continually alters its curvature and its dimensions; it does not persist as a stable, enduring container for objects that would be situated solidly within it.”³⁷⁰ In this sense, the space, or rather space-time, of digital images is not “analogical and indexical” but “processual and combinatorial,”³⁷¹ sucking us into the middle of processes that “do not occur *in* space but define their own spatial frame.”³⁷² Shaviro thus offers a different understanding of what film theorist David Rodowick, together with many others, lamented as the loss of the capacity of the image to “communicate duration”³⁷³ or to capture the “curious sentiment that things absent in time can be present in space.”³⁷⁴ Suggesting that we should approach this change in a more “affirmative sense,” he claims that having lost “a certain humanist pathos of lived duration, in return we have gained the sheer profusion and density of ‘real-time’ innovation and invention.”³⁷⁵ Extrapolating Deleuze, he thus argues that “[j]ust as the movement-image gave

³⁶⁹ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 18.

³⁷⁰ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 16.

³⁷¹ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 17.

³⁷² Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 16.

³⁷³ David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007, p. 163, quoted in: Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 87.

³⁷⁴ David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film...*, p. 63, p. 67, quoted in: Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 17.

³⁷⁵ Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 87.

way to the time-image, so now the time-image gives way to a new sort of audiovisual or multimedia image.”³⁷⁶

The mention of the reticent “humanism” of such nostalgic longing has to be underlined here, and can perhaps be also linked to Laruelle’s idea about philosophers being afraid of the dark – because the sticky matter of digital images contains something machinically alien to us, which we can’t comprehend but which circulates through our very bodies nevertheless. But as Shaviri points out and as it is nowadays widely affirmed, the “analogical world”³⁷⁷ is not coming back and instead of mourning the “existential and aesthetic loss”³⁷⁸ and turning into the blind streets of rejection, we must try to “to understand the political implications of the situation” and “explore the new possibilities that it offers.”³⁷⁹

Contemporary digital images (whether in art video or a Hollywood blockbuster) are thus radically different from traditional cinema, as they cease to be about “duration of bodies and images” but become performatively productive “articulation[s] and composition[s] of forces,”³⁸⁰ which are often not indexically connected to a former physical space and time but are no less part of the world, reshaping everything in “real time.”³⁸¹ As Mark asks in the aforementioned scene by the lake: “I don’t know... How are we measuring time, first of all?” Trecartin replies: “They don’t measure it... *Occupy* it,” we thus cannot shed off the feeling of dissolving into one big swirl of digitally infused mix of perceptions and impressions where former stabilized categories of space or linearity don’t make no sense anymore. Because if Shaviri observes that the digital image “generates its own space, in the course of its modulations,”³⁸² we might add that in contemporary fluid ontology, this space necessarily pours out into all “other” spaces. By consequence, “our” own lived space also becomes “a sphere of liquidity, of looming rainstorms and unstable climates, [a] realm of complexity gone haywire, spinning strange feedback loops,”³⁸³ growing, as Steyerl adds, into a dark mutable “fog which may at any second transform both into an immersive art installation and a demonstration doused in cutting-edge tear gas.”³⁸⁴

³⁷⁶ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 87.

³⁷⁷ David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film...*, p. 174, quoted in: Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 112.

³⁷⁸ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 113.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 17.

³⁸¹ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 16.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, pp. 17–18.

³⁸⁴ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World...*, p. 18.

Steyerl also directly talks about the so-called death of cinema, claiming that it has “exploded into the world to become partly real” and underlining that to be able to act upon anything, we first and foremost have to acknowledge this explosion (as well as its effects on “reality”). But the fact that cinema “probably didn’t make it through” has to be understood in already outlined terms by which whatever was/is happening now should not be taken as “post” or simply “after.” Echoing Steven Shaviro’s depiction of post-cinematic qualities, we could thus say that cinema hasn’t exactly died but turned into a ghostly liquid figure passing sneakily through the screens. Works of Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, Hito Steyerl and others yet to be mentioned can be seen as open points of confluence trying to embody or enter how cinema has mutated into these other image-forms, intensively active while being inseparably tied to both organic and inorganic particles. Because if cinematic images evaporated from the analogue projection screen, it was only to start condensing and precipitating on other surfaces that perhaps don’t cast shadow when we touch them, but which haven’t lost any significance in terms of how they influence our perception and thinking. Moreover, we could say that after its “death,” the foggy ghost of cinema is now in some sense perhaps more alive than ever before, as it has invaded all spaces of communication and thought in the 21st century. It is thus not a question of asking whether a Tik Tok video can be considered a direct descendant of cinema or not and why (which would definitely bring numerous oppositional and highly unimportant arguments), but of simply acknowledging that moving images are filling not only screens but also the spaces between them to an extent which cannot be ignored or simply nostalgically refused – “night vision” is upon us whether we decide to switch to the dark mode or not.

3.2.2. Night Vision: Seeing (in) the Invisible World

"It's just lighting design, so hard to get it right sometimes."

– Mark Trade (2016)

"Rough pixels hide in the cracks of old standards of resolution. They throw off the cloak of representation."

– How Not to be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File (2013)

The above expressed liquidity of the digital is in a sense approached very literally in the work of British artist Joey Holder, who often combines mythology and network culture with motifs of oceanic depths. Using material objects as well as 3D sculpting, she creates immersive environments consisting of physical objects, digital prints as well as moving image works, in which strange fictional beings deriving from sea creatures or insect (parts) merge with layers of symbols and signs. Having at one time been a diving instructor, Holder remained fascinated by the unknowability of those impassable oceanic depths. She often models mutating fictional agents inhabiting them (and here we can recall Vermeulen's idea of the performative "imagining" of the invisible performed by the snorkeler), while at the same time sometimes collaborating with scientists on research in such fields like computational biology, speculating on the reciprocal relation between the digital and the biological. Her installation *Ophiux* (2016), for example, revolves around a speculative pharmaceutical company of the same name, and includes a video consisting of many layers of underwater footage and science imaging technologies and models (**figure 5**), to show how in genetic sequencing process, the biological tissue becomes data, allowing for living entities to be synthetically fictioned through digital programming. In most of her projects, oceanic liquidity is treated as sort of a dense, scary, futuristic clay, as she keeps shifting shapes, mixing layers and letting them grow into yet unnamed registers and categories, demonstrating how nowadays everything, including human bodies is being modeled and digitally processed.

Her recent video project *The Abyssal Seeker* was installed in a different setting in three exhibition spaces distinguished by subtitles corresponding to oceanic zones – one of them,³⁸⁵

³⁸⁵ The two others being: previous "Demersal Zone" at Seventeen London and following "Pelagic Zone" at the British Art Show at Aberdeen Art Gallery.

the “Benethic Zone,” was presented also in Centre for Contemporary Art FUTURA in Prague. Holder describes the project as a “journey to a deep sea brine lake, which remains undiscovered by science,” explaining that “the film installation depicts the strange creatures that live there, which are able to shape-shift, metamorphosize and swap genetic material.”³⁸⁶ This mutability – or what the curator of the Prague exhibition Boris Ondreička calls: “the data-genesis of mineral-vegetable-animal-machine complexity”³⁸⁷ – is crucial for us, as it is expressive of both the ungraspable changeability of (subject) matter and of the radically transmorphing tendency (and potential) of digital technologies and images themselves. Holder further refers to the project as speaking of the “remote,” “unexplored” existing at the “limit of human knowledge,” and directly connects this unknowability with the human inability to keep up with computation, suggesting we perhaps need to “become ‘less human’ to confound datafication.”³⁸⁸

But there seem to be a yet different form of invisibility at play within the realm of digital images – one not clothed in black but perhaps, as suggests Hito Steyerl’s *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), “fitted with an invisibility cloak.” The video also deals with the ubiquitous fluidity of digital images but emphasizes the apparent translucence we usually ascribe to them (as laid out in the first chapter). The idea of inseparability from the digital network is here demonstrated ironically by way of a performed “manual,” in which Steyerl herself enacts the “tips” for how to hide from the sight of digital technologies (many of whom evoke certain unreality or reference other societal problems, listing for example “being female and over fifty” among “surfing the dark web” or “being a wi-fi signal moving through human body”); pointing to the omnipresence of digital recording and post-production in our daily life as well as in business, governance, or warfare.

Created in 2013, the imagery already bears marks of aging in terms of the visuality of the 3D graphics and the early meme aesthetics references (**figure 6**), ensuring us only how fast the digital technologies’ evolution spin. But in its understanding of inescapable materiality of digital mediation, it hasn’t lost any of its relevance.³⁸⁹ The video as such is an overlapping combination of diverse images, the most recurrent being an old, marked square of

³⁸⁶ Vitaly Bezpalov, Natalya Serkova: Joey Holder: ‘I hope that art can continue to question the dominant structures’. *Tzvetnik*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://tzvetnik.online/article/joey-holder-i-hope-that-art-can-continue-to-question-the-dominant-structures> > [publication date unknown, accessed 28. 7. 2021].

³⁸⁷ Boris Ondreička, curatorial text to Joey Holder: *The Abyssal Seeker*, [Benethic Zone], Centre for Contemporary Art FUTURA, Prague, 2021.

³⁸⁸ Vitaly Bezpalov, Natalya Serkova: Joey Holder: ‘I hope that art...

³⁸⁹ I have first encountered the video as it popped up in my Facebook feed, not even aware it once could have been screened in a gallery. Being accessible online also today, while appropriating the Youtube tutorial “how to” format, it is also indirectly referring to the immense stream of moving images on Youtube itself, speaking thus about them, through them.

cracked concrete situated somewhere in the California desert – a resolution target whose pattern has been “decommissioned in 2006 as analogue photography lost its importance” (– a cruel and indiscriminate answer to those nostalgically praising its qualities). The central motif of visibility is thus directly tied with the problem of resolution, showing how drastically technologies as aerial photography progressed with the advent of digital media.

How Not to be Seen shows us the extreme scope and variability of this endless automated image-coverage by stretching literally from an image of the whole planet Earth all the way down to a single calibration pixel (**figure 7**). Showing us how easily we can now visualize the whole planet while at the same time reminding us, that to be invisible today, one would need “to become smaller or equal to one pixel;” the video makes clear the at the same time micro and macro qualities of technological imaging and reasoning – in the 21st century, we are literally “calib[rating] the world as a picture.” In his book *How to See the World*, visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff nicely grasps this upswing of imaging technologies by explaining the difference between the “Blue Marble,” an analogue photograph of our planet taken from the space in 1972, and the more recent 2012 version NASA assembled in post-production from diverse satellite images, demonstrating by its “tiled rendering [the] standard means of constructing digital imagery.”³⁹⁰ But as Mirzoeff also notices, better resolution doesn’t always mean better visibility – “We assemble a world from pieces, assuming that what we see is both coherent and equivalent to reality. Until we discover it is not.”³⁹¹

As in resonance with this observation about the often discretely modulated status of reality, Steyerl’s video dramatizes all major post-production techniques and tricks at play in contemporary world of digital media, demonstrating the elasticity with which the image can be enlarged, downsized, multiplied, or cut out, swiping her fingers before the camera to demonstrate the easy flow of interaction with images on touch screens, but also to show how easily objects and images can disappear or (re)enter the scene, whether they are keyed-out shapes of real footage or modeled digitally. The resulting video thus comprises of camera footage, graphic onscreen text, 3D animations of both objects, figures and 3D renders of idealized architectural spaces or airport halls (**figure 8**), all blending together with graphic marks and resolution targets, leaving us with the impression of watching one borderless pixel-liquid leaking through frames, green screen backgrounds or computer desktops (**figure 9**), spiraling out of iPhone displays (**figure 10**) into the open air and dripping back on the “material” ground, staining it with irreversible imprints.

³⁹⁰ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*. London: Pelican Books 2014. pp. 7–8.

³⁹¹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World...*, pp. 8–9.

The video therefore expresses what Shaviro claims about the time-space of digital images, freely crossing scales and types of materials, the action unfolding in a space that is more of a non-space (as it largely consists of special effects tools which we normally should not even be able to see) of radical transformation in which the very border between the “real” and the “virtual” space becomes arbitrary. The main theme of the impossibility to withdraw from the world of images, is of course first to be understood on the level of actual visibility for CCTV cameras, drones, Google Street View cars or simply recording devices of other people, pointing to the growing omnipresence of digital mediation. But this wouldn’t be of that much significance if such images were simply derivative ones representing something more “real” out there in the world. But the world itself became an image. Not because there would simply be too much visualization, but exactly because images are nowadays both frameless, borderless, and materially effective. Far from any metaphorical reading, the question of visibility and invisibility is thus often a matter of life and death – a cruel productive poetics of combat drones seeing without the need for human eyes or decisions (which we shall return to in the next chapter) and leaked images spreading through the internet with unstoppable speed.

3.2.3. Phantoms in the Shadows: The Hidden Lives of Digital Beings

“When he passed there was a flood.”

– Hyperlinks or It Didn’t Happen (2014)

[T]he technical object is never fully known

– Gilbert Simondon, On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects

“I’m not magic. Please don’t call me uncanny, I’m just a bad copy, made too perfectly, too soon...” When famous American actor Philip Seymour Hoffman died, he was just in the process of finishing the shooting of the first part of *Hunger Games: Mockingjay* (dir. Francis Lawrence, 2014). While pondering how to get the remaining scenes done, the studio was considering recreating him digitally. In the end, they decided not to, stating that it would be a dishonor to digitally replace the skills of such a brilliant actor,³⁹² but it could have very well also been because the attempt was technologically unsuccessful, because of the reactions of the fans, or for yet other reasons. Nevertheless, the idea of a failed unused digital twin-avatar, being left abandoned on a dusty hard drive somewhere in the labyrinth of Lionsgate Entertainment files, gave birth to the narrator of Belgian-American artist Cécile B. Evans’ video *Hyperlinks or It didn’t Happen* (2014). Opening with a strongly lit high resolution CGI head of the famous actor on an indifferently white background transitioning into electric blue ocean footage of swimming medusas (**figure 11**), the film is described by Evans herself as being about “lives of a group of digital beings, or digital agents, and their search for meaning.”³⁹³

In the course of its non-linear structure, jumping from one image to another (the word “hyperlinks” in the title is not accidental, but must still be strongly distinguished from the purely textual “hypertext” logic and its theorizations, as the video itself attempts to embody contemporary internet formed – as we have already described through Hui – also by images and objects), the video thus follows not only “Phil’s” struggle with the nature of his

³⁹² Molly Freeman: 'Mockingjay' Director Refused to Use CGI to Recreate Philip Seymour Hoffman. *Screen Rant*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://screenrant.com/hunger-games-mockingjay-philip-seymour-hoffman-no-cgi/>> [published 15. 11. 2014, accessed 23. 7. 2021].

³⁹³ Louisiana Channel, Cécile B. Evans Interview: The Virtual is Real. Accessible at WWW: <<https://vimeo.com/177369762>> [publication date unknown, accessed 13. 5. 2021].

relationship toward the “real” Philip Seymour Hoffman, but also other digital personae: a spambot Agnes, living in that time on the Serpentine Galleries web page,³⁹⁴ a character of an Invisible woman, or a famous singing Japanese hologram Hatsune Miku.³⁹⁵ *Hyperlinks* expresses, albeit from a more human-centered perspective, something very important in terms of what we try to claim here, as it ascribes agency to digital objects (understandable by what was developed in the previous chapter, 3.1.). The digital characters inhabiting the video are presented as complex technical objects; moreover, they embody the heavy materiality of such “objectness” exactly by not being reducible to any sum of images presented in the video itself. Because most of the characters of the story have “real-life” context and connotations, individual histories and more than “real” connections to places, people and happenings in the “physical” world (as it is with the footage of the North Korean dancers of whom we are told were probably executed for dancing to western song *What a Feeling*, after the video leaked). In this sense, Evans’ claim that “the virtual is real,” expressed in an interview for Louisiana channel,³⁹⁶ has a very similar connotation to what we have tried to lay out and what also stands as a central motif in numerous videos by Steyerl – digital images are objects (or even subjects) with material traction on the physical world and the feelings, deaths and political consequences they are connected to are incontestably real. And yet they typically exist in a twilight zone of human (in)visibility, exactly and only because they “take shape on a screen or hide in the back end of a computer program.”³⁹⁷

The video thus efficiently points to our ignorance of their agency by bringing in something we often conceive of as separate or even opposed to technology – feelings. Evans seems to be interested in lives of objects in general, as she also lets 3D models of everyday tools, such as a comb, a pair of scissors or a screwdriver, wavily dance in her video *How Happy a Thing can be* (2014) to the sound of a song with emotional lyrics: “I gave you all the life I got. I gave you more than I could give.” *Hyperlinks* can be seen as having a similar tendency to use digital technologies of editing and 3D modeling to speak about often hidden and unacknowledged agency of digital objects whose existence nevertheless influences and sometimes even conditions our own lives. The video thus attempts to create a feeling of compassion with its digital protagonists, of whom we are at the same time, unlike in a usual animated movie, repeatedly reminded that they are just a “bad copy,” not having a body,

³⁹⁴ Agnes, *Net Art Anthology*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://anthology.rhizome.org/agnes>> [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 4. 2021].

³⁹⁵ See: WWW <https://vocaloid.fandom.com/wiki/Hatsune_Miku>

³⁹⁶ Louisiana Channel, Cécile B. Evans Interview: The Virtual is Real...

³⁹⁷ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 1.

being on a “hard drive” or a “server.” Their digitality is, interestingly enough, also underlined through a water-connected imagery, as the shot with medusas from the beginning of the video, together with other underwater or water-themed footage, keep re-appearing when hologram girl Miku dances in a wooden room (**figure 12**) or as we encounter the invisible woman on a seashore (**figure 13**).

Hyperlinks doesn't try to explain why we should or should not think of digital beings in a certain way. It doesn't criticize either the internet or us as its users. Instead, it takes existing digital objects, it fabricates others and weaves their stories together in a fictional video, giving them feelings of sadness, happiness, confusion, or mourning. But such emotional anthropomorphizing doesn't serve to claim they need to have anything like human feelings, but instead to make the spectator *feel* some sort of empathy. By showing digital objects as agents with relationships and emotions, Evans thus makes it hard to continue perceiving them in terms of mere entertainment or utility to a point from which the very distinction between an object and a subject also begins to be questioned, heightening our sensitivity toward something we usually don't view as needing this kind of attention. And as Bernard Stiegler says: “To pay attention is to take care.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁸ Bernard Stiegler: Within the limits of capitalism, economizing means taking care. *Ars Industrialis*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://arsindustrialis.org/node/2922> > [publication date unknown.; accessed 5. 7. 2021].

3.2.4. Merging into a World Made of Images

*Invisible people retreat into 3D animations...they reemerge as pixels...
they merge into a world made of images.*

– How Not to be Seen (2013)

When I say people, I mean the things that you have become more recently.

– Centre Jenny (2013)

Hyperlinks are notable for yet another reason – they disentangle the supposedly derivative relationship between a physical human person and her/his avatar. The video reverses the logic in which we usually speak about avatars, inspecting always how *we* relate to *them*, showing that Phil fears his own imperfection and lack of qualities in comparison to the actual Philip Seymour Hoffman, stating that he has “a certain wounded unfixable longing to be better for him” as he expresses an uneasily graspable impression of connection: “I feel like I know him.” The destiny of a 3D render trying to connect to somebody beyond the grave is entangled also in a supposedly true story about a young man, claiming with shivering voice that his girlfriend keeps messaging him on Facebook months after she died in a three-car collision. And in yet another hyperlink, we encounter through the (virtual) mouth of Agnes the story of a celebrity avatar modeled for an online game, “freaking [...] out” after realizing the people playing the game don’t want to “hang out with her but *become* her.” When Phil suggests to ask the actual celebrity to do something, Agnes reminds him, that the celebrity in the game is “different” than the “real” celebrity, probably untouched by her fears, using her simply to gain money. These struggles can be, with a little imaginative leap, connected to Simondon’s idea of technical objects “freeing” themselves from their original supposed meaning, becoming something else, something unplanned that wasn’t “part of the design.”³⁹⁹

Similar exploration of avatars happens in *Centre Jenny* where, as unclear as the film intentionally is about itself, there is a group of seemingly post-human characters, at least as far as they keep referring to humans as to some other, previous form of existence. “We’ve evolved from animations and these animations actually evolved from humans,” says one of many girls dressed in peculiar sweatshirts in the style of American sorority apparel, and looking, like most of the characters in the film, arguably intoxicated with a sort of space-time-

³⁹⁹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 103.

warping kind of viral methamphetamine, giving the whole video, together with the costuming and rather extreme albeit rough and lo-fi usage of coloring and lights, a yet stronger feeling of unfolding on an alien machine-smoked dance floor in the late hours of an all-night-long party.

Moreover, most of the female-performed characters⁴⁰⁰ are referred to as “Jenny,” giving impression of some identity replication or stages of perfection in the development of a software program, bringing itself closer to the “Centre” in an education group actually referenced to as a “university.” Burrows and O’Sullivan also bring up Trecartin and Fitch in their book on *Fictioning*, stating that they “are producing avatars which experiment with the new temporalities and spatial relations produced by social media communication, advertising and transformations of work and leisure time,” being always “fluid and able to adapt to new and fast-moving digital cultures.”⁴⁰¹

If we would, perhaps with a slight venture, re-appropriate Hui, we can say that what we observe in these and other moving images as well as in our mutual interactions with avatars in general, is a “double movement” of “datafication of persons” and “personification of data.” This seems to be a rather extreme claim, but our own identities are increasingly more connected with images that co-constitute them – something Steyerl was articulating in many of her earlier films, including *November* (2004), where she traces an image of her close friend who died fighting along female Kurdish militia. And this mutual interchangeability between physical and virtual existence⁴⁰² is expressed also in *How Not to be Seen*, in an almost comedically literal image of pixels changing into human bodies (**figure 14**), as well as by anonymous grey figures from architectural project visualizations filling the real shots of the decommissioned analogue resolution target (**figure 15**).

⁴⁰⁰ In Trecartin’s and Fitch’s films, the notion of gender is radically – in Trecartin’s own words „fluid“ – and taking it in any way definitely would go directly against their logic.

⁴⁰¹ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 394.

⁴⁰² In a yet different way, this mutual relationship is explored also in the work of Czech artist Jakub Choma. In his project *Gears of Life* made for Jindřich Chalupecký Award 2020, he created a huge installation of diverse objects from wood and other types of materials, whose meaning first often seemed unclear to the visitor. In a video presented on the screen, Choma himself, or what can be seen as his fictionalized alter-ego, walks around with a lantern flashlight and metallic paint on the downer part of his face, dragging objects around, laying down, shining the light on details and punching holes into the thin artificial walls. It is only by seeing the video of character’s movement in space what makes it possible to realize actual handles hidden in the objects and notice trajectories and body imprints that led to such constellation. What is created is an uncanny sense of presence of the virtual figure in the very physical space of the gallery, allowing us to materialize feelings evoked through digital images into the physical space surrounding us. The video is accessible at WWW:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaOginZaLow&ab_channel=JakubChoma>

3.2.5. Entangled Fictions: Stories in Between

Phil: "Oh Agnes, I never said this narrative was linear."

....

Agnes: "No problem, everyone loses the plot."

– Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen (2014)

The reappearance of the spam bot Agnes, commissioned originally for Serpentine gallery's web page, in *Hyperlinks* – one of several intertwined threads stretched across Evans' work – is a nice example of certain interconnectedness present in and allowed through the mutability and replicability of digital objects. If you visit Ryan Trecartin's Vimeo account, you will find a series of clips, each followed by a caption "whether line clip" after a dash. Most of them show Trecartin dressed as a sort of Amish-looking character of somebody referred to as the "Neighbor girl" (**figure 16**), multiplied with several similarly looking "cousins" and other protagonists, plotting different activities, leading dialogues, and performing various actions inside of the house and on adjacent homestead-reminiscent properties. These clips are connected to the most recent video project *Whether Line* (2019), again put together with Lizzie Fitch, commissioned for Fondazione Prada in Milan. The gallery, where the first output of the whole project was presented in the form of a multimedia installation, states that Fitch and Trecartin "conceived the framework for a new movie as a haunted map: a location with its own will and a constellation of permanent built sets which include a large hobby-barn commissary, a lazy river, and a forest watchtower, occupied by a cast of characters who are simultaneously agents and subjects of the map."⁴⁰³ This annotation captures nicely the core of the artists duo's practice, developing narratives and film characters across time and space "to explore the notion of borders and boundaries—existential, psychosocial, and physical."⁴⁰⁴ As the first output of the project was presented in 2019, it has already been in process since late 2016.⁴⁰⁵ Working with extensive and mutable film sets which can assume different shapes to shift to diverse stages leading to numerous shots used in multiple movies (as they already did with a group of videos – *Junior War*, *CENTRE JENNY*, *Comma Boat* and *Item Falls* all shot in 2013 and presented primarily on the 55th Venice Biennale) they decided to push the method

⁴⁰³ Web of Fondazione Prada, accessible at WWW: < <https://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/lizzie-fitch-and-ryan-trecartin/?lang=en> > [publication date unknown, accessed 6. 7. 2021].

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

even further. Relocating their studio into the Ohio countryside, where they now live and work, they began building diverse architectural features and spaces which continually become part of something they describe as simultaneously a film set and as an amusement park.

Being asked in an interview for Artnet, whether what they are building becomes part of their work, Fitch said: “we’ve been doing a lot more things that are just non-agenda-filled, in terms of a product. And even though maybe they’ll eventually be part of whatever this land becomes, it’s not like we’re building them for that reason.”⁴⁰⁶ This answer shows something important about the entangled relationship between a continuously developing fiction and its presentation in the form of digital moving images (whether showed as a video on the internet or a screening or as a part of a mixed media installation), as it doesn’t start and end with the shooting or a single release, but is being built, lived in, lived through and partly mediated by artists (and some of the actors) themselves, blurring thus the very boundary between their own lives and the fiction(s) they create. The same goes for the complex relationship between, for example, the physical Ryan Trecartin, actually living in quite specific and nonstandard architecture (**figure 17**) designed as the home of the Neighbor girl and full of film props.

As much as the off-the-grid setting might look disconnected from the ultra-mediated world, the whole project takes shape as an extreme reality(–fiction) show, crossing many lines of the usual creative process of a single artwork. The digital image-fictions produced in such a way are necessarily entangled not only with actual physical spaces of human life, in which sense they can be said to be almost documentary, but as Trecartin and Fitch describe in one interview,⁴⁰⁷ some of the local people have even naturally entered the narrative, reshaped many previous ideas and transformed the film(s). This approach to fictioning as a continuous knitting together of stories with other agents and environments is famously postulated by Donna Haraway⁴⁰⁸ and we could argue that despite the common notions of the diffracting effects of digital media, it is exactly their shape-ability that also allows for the creation of a way more entangled and fluid network of mutually interacting elements, the understanding of which is often enabled by online accessibility and the intense mediation of contemporary art.

Similar long-term fiction knitting can be found also in the *Club of Opportunities* (2017–ongoing) project by Czech artist Jakub Jansa, whose grand narrative unfolds in the course of an as of yet undefined number of exhibitions, each of which “creates situations which hover between reality and fiction, where the narrative is gradually revealed through

⁴⁰⁶ Scott Indrisek: ‘It’s Exciting to Be in a Swing State’: Why Artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch Moved to Ohio to Build a Rural Amusement Park. Artnet. Accessible at WWW: < <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ryan-trecartin-lizzie-fitch-ohio-1523341> > [published 23. 4. 2019, accessed 12. 5. 2021].

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble...*

video, various objects, and ongoing live action.”⁴⁰⁹ While recycling some of the motifs, revolving so far predominantly around under-appreciation of celery and attached struggles of a celery-human hybrid, each exhibition introduces a new character or a new plot twist, creating thus an intertwined structure of fictions that explores “the anatomy of mythology and storytelling”⁴¹⁰ itself.

⁴⁰⁹ *Club of Opportunities* informational PDF, provided by Jakub Jansa.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

3.3. Fictioning (with) Machines

[I]t has become clear that images are not objective or subjective rendition of a preexisting condition, or merely treacherous appearances. They are rather nodes of energy and matter that migrate across different supports, shaping and affecting people, landscapes, politics, and social systems.

– Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?*

3.3.1. Magic Cuts

When I walked out of the cinema after seeing *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019, dir. Robert Rodriguez), I couldn't shed off a feeling of unreality. Without the need to get into the details of the (in this instance irrelevant) cyberpunk-style plot about a cyborg heroine with memory loss trying to uncover her past, the way the main character of Alita balanced on the verge of being a completely realistic human being and having uncanny manga-looking eyes made me think of the film way more than I probably otherwise would have. Alita is played by a human actress, Rosa Salazar, and her body as well as the rest of her face is left almost humanoid – but in its center, there is a pair of disturbingly big eyes, just “normal” enough to be somehow believable, but too CGI to ever be considered human.

When thinking about why this resonated so strongly with me, I realized it was because it felt like marking a step over certain threshold and entering thereby a visual register in which we achieved such level of perfection, but even more importantly, such a “natural” relationship to CGI in terms of spectatorship, that we don't have to go for either a stylized image of admittedly animated movies or attempt at the most seamless realistic trickery in “real” film footage – the digital image became such a mutable mixture of “reality” and “fiction,” of shooting and digital modeling, that we can now mold them together as one pixel-clay.

Ryan Trecartin became quite visible in the art-world slightly after the break of the century for his work with what we could now perhaps retrospectively call “early Youtube video aesthetics.” Videos like *A Family finds entertainment* (2004) use extensive collages of images and text glued together with shrill transitions reminiscent of photo stories in 2000's teenage girls' magazines or older Power Point star or heart-shaped animations circulating in email chains before the advent of social media. Already back then, Trecartin was using visuality closely connected to erstwhile technological development. In many ways, his work

remained consistent – but as it evolved along the contemporary digital media sphere, there seems to be an observable shift in the way the images communicate. While in the early 2000s the internal logic resided more in a juxtapositional “hypermediation”⁴¹¹ and expressive, colorful, and sharp-edged clashing of heterogenous images, in later videos, the friction changed into some kind of a continuous haul: the split screens don’t juxtapose or connect, but often show just two (slightly) different camera angles at once (**figure 18**), two and more shots overlap in one thick layered image (**figure 19**), the normal hand-held cameras frenetically move around, combined with toxic green lighting of the night vision mode, actual green-screen surfaces are used in the architecture of the set (**figure 20**)... All swimming in thick layers of bitty chatter, colored by the occasional, repeated, slowed down, stretched sounds of a ringtone, while the voices are often autotuned beyond comprehensibility, and the uneasily understandable speech bears more affective flows than information... None of this heavy weight of image and sound manipulation in Trecartin’s and Fitch’s movies is supposed to create a conflict, nor a directly legible meaning. And this is true also of many other digital moving images in contemporary art. While the intensity and quantity of images has never stopped increasing, even extremely heterogenous images, collages and cuts stopped working as clashes of meanings or contexts, and have dissolved into a much more interconnected and mutable material.

Also here already discussed *Hyperlinks or it didn’t happen* combines diverse film shots, including classical film footage, with both 2D and 3D animation, often merging more types of images (**figure 21**) into one or layering them together, some functioning as a background or perhaps a desktop for others (**figure 22**). But despite displaying multiple heterogenous images at once and following the “hyperlink” structure, the aim of the video is not to pit the images, objects and narratives against each other – instead, they appear to hold together with unexpected unity as they are interwoven with feelings of confusion, sadness and compassion, creating links across decades, colors, topics and contexts.

Similarly, in *How Not to be Seen*, the green screens and resolution targets don’t serve to unmask a hidden reality, as much as to liquify it. As the video progresses, digital and “real” figures congregate on the Google Street view of the dessert with the real resolution target overlapped with both digital pixels and analogue resolution marks. Moreover, the whole scene at a certain moment zooms out to show it is being keyed onto a green screen in a studio, while at the same time placing a Macbook menu bar and icons (among others, of a dark web browser Tor and a torrent client Transmission, used for peer-to-peer downloading) on the sky,

⁴¹¹ Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation...*

morphing thus together with a computer screen. But this layering doesn't want us to interpret the levels of (hyper)mediation, which it bends and blurs to such an extent that the task of interpretation is itself rendered impossible. Instead, it attempts to embody the present reality in which, at least in terms of its influence, the (dark) web does wander the "real" landscape no less than human bodies and where pixels can be more real than grains of sand, if, as Benjamin Bratton notes, "more humans hav[e] access to a cell phone than to toilets."⁴¹²

In an article for *Flash Art* magazine, Jarret Gregory describes the shooting of the four Trecartin's and Fitch's movies featured on the 55th Venice Biennale as follows: "Filming takes place throughout the night; in the spring of 2013 the artists held eighteen shoots from approximately 8 pm until sunrise with three to five cameras active at a time, generating hundreds of hours of footage. Everyone on set was in costume [...], thus eliminating any distinction between on and offstage. Each participant was miked and all of the input was fed through a PA system and auto-tuned in real time, which encouraged experimentation and allowed for more extraneous material to be usable."⁴¹³ This description grasps two major aspects of digital images and sounds: omnipresence and radical direct mutability. And these qualities, expressed nicely both in the form and the production process of Trecartin's and Fitch's films, can perhaps also help us explain why digital images don't seem to clash anymore: They are simply too interwoven, too open, too mergeable. When they meet, they don't strike – they morph into each other (**figure 23**).

Contemporary post-production technologies of audio and video special effects, unified by digital code, thus seem to allow for creation of images that are increasingly more elastic and flowing – as they overlap, the sharp edges of clashing images melt together and gain voluminosity. But as was already emphasized, this fluidity must be understood without reduction to mere seamless flow. As Hui mentions, computational data are a "flux,"⁴¹⁴ but they also have "granularity," which allows us to distinguish "a selected reality"⁴¹⁵ based on an "order of magnitude"⁴¹⁶ we choose to take. Something similar can perhaps be said about the contemporary digital moving image, which spins into an ever-faster image-storms, but gives the impression of increasing smoothness in surfaces and visuality, submerging us within itself with growing ease. Trecartin's and Fitch's films are important since they make this paradox

⁴¹² Benjamin Bratton: On Speculative Design. *DIS*. Accessible at WWW: <<http://dismagazine.com/discussion/81971/on-speculative-design-benjamin-h-bratton/>> [published 10. 2. 2016, accessed 6. 7. 2021].

⁴¹³ Jarret Gregory: Networks of Influence. *Flash Art*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://flash---art.com/article/networks-of-influence/>> [published 3. 10. 2014, accessed 11. 7. 2021].

⁴¹⁴ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 92.

⁴¹⁵ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 30.

⁴¹⁶ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 29.

extremely tangible. Combining the “visual composition of reality television with the ubiquity of surveillance,” they produce a “surplus of audio and visual data that could be arranged into an endless number of narratives,”⁴¹⁷ creating sticky coherence and hypnotic centripetality out of multitudinous diffracting material. This is only enhanced by the aforementioned interconnectedness of certain repeating motifs, costumes, phrases, and actors, which, as most of the videos are made accessible online, allows us to knit some of these links together and watch them grow into a vast many-directional fictional universe.

When trying to articulate the hyperstitional, non-linear qualities of computational technologies, Ccru consistently turned to the works of William S. Burroughs, whom we have mentioned earlier on. O’Sullivan and Burrows in their book on fictioning also refer to his “cut-up technique,”⁴¹⁸ which was intended to disrupt the dominant (time) order by the “cutting, folding and splicing of text,” not in order to create juxtapositions of the words, but to “fiction other realities from existing one.”⁴¹⁹ As Burroughs himself is quoted by Ccru: “Cut the Word Lines with scissors or switchblades as preferred ... The Word Lines keep you in time....”⁴²⁰ For this approach, he is often mentioned in conjunction with hypertext, but what is of more interest here is the productive make-believe logic which Ccru underlines, stating that “every act of writing is [possibly] a sorcerous operation,”⁴²¹ as well as their appeal to treat even something supposedly so symbolic as written language as “its own kind of material to be manipulated”⁴²² (which has a particular resonance also with some of the notions about materiality outlined in the second chapter of this thesis). It seems that similar logic can perhaps be applied to the usage of cut in the work of Trecartin and Fitch, as well as in other contemporary moving images – it doesn’t merely juxtapose two or even multiple elements, but, as Burrows and O’Sullivan observe, it functions as certain kind of “magical technology [...] transforming a given reality.”⁴²³ This seems to be echoed also by Trecartin himself, defining his approach as “spell-casting” or even a “kind of magic” – “an invention that than creates reality.”⁴²⁴ As one of the characters from *Whether Line* has it: “I’ll see it when I believe it.”

⁴¹⁷ Jarret Gregory: *Networks of Influence...*

⁴¹⁸ Developed by Burroughs at the end of the 1950s and in early 1960s.

⁴¹⁹ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p.

⁴²⁰ Ccru, *Lemurian Time War...*, p. 43.

⁴²¹ Ccru, *Lemurian Time War...*, p. 36.

⁴²² David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 36

⁴²³ Ibid

⁴²⁴ Louisiana Channel, Ryan Trecartin Interview: Gender is Fluid. Video accessible at WWW:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_j1lpPFmIc&ab_channel=LouisianaChannel> [uploaded 5. 6. 2018, accessed 9. 3. 2021].

3.3.2. Rendering Fictions

*Render: To cause to be or become, make.
The process of making an image from a 2D or 3D model.*

– Useful Terms for Hyperlinks⁴²⁵

Animation is part of our evolutionary arc as a species; it's still primitive – the seeds of a complicated relationship that we're going to have with artificial intelligence.

– Ryan Trecartin

I've always confused the physical with the immaterial, at either one's limit, I think.

– Ed Atkins

British artist Ed Atkins is widely known for his hyperrealistic CGI videos questioning the relationship between bodies and technology. They usually feature a white male character developed across different works in past years, sometimes strangely changed in terms of structure or size or disturbingly mutilated (**figure 24**). In one interview, Atkins seems to be echoing our observations about both meaningfulness and feeling: “At a certain point I became less and less interested in producing meaning—but instead a kind of uncertainty. I was always more interested in how something feels, rather than what it means.”⁴²⁶ But the mutability and affective charge within his videos seem to be about yet something more. Earlier in the same interview, he claims he wants to make work of which he “does not necessarily know what it is.” This might first sound contradictory to producing something so technical and artificially “made” – unlike Trecartin’s videos, a full CGI doesn’t seem to offer much space for the entering of chance or unexpected agency.⁴²⁷ But on the other hand, it connects quite well with the way we have spoken about digital objects so far.

⁴²⁵ The whole sheet accessible at WWW: <<http://dismagazine.com/dystopia/74959/hyperlinks-or-it-didnt-happen-cecile-b-evans/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 10. 8. 2021].

⁴²⁶ Timo Feldhaus: Ed Atkins: “I Am Not an Authority on Who I Am.” *SSENSE*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.ssense.com/ko-kr/editorial/art/i-am-not-an-authority-on-who-i-am>> [publication date unknown, accessed 12. 8. 2021].

⁴²⁷ But we must mention that Trecartin in fact usually writes a very complex script and some of the scenes are obeying a well thought through structure.

Yuk Hui, following Simondon, criticizes the classical philosophical concept of hylomorphism, stating that the “separation of form and matter,”⁴²⁸ presupposes “an already individuated form that gives matter its essence,”⁴²⁹ breaking thus apart at the same time also “*theoria* from *praxis* and *poiesis*.”⁴³⁰ But as we have seen, there is no stable given form shaping the matter of digital objects. Instead, any form seems to be actively producing always “something other than its intended effects in material terms.”⁴³¹ This is commented on also by Jussi Parikka, who, following Deleuze and Guattari, suggests that hylomorphic dualism is “haunting the linguistically modeled idea of meaning” while materiality necessarily includes also “asignifying elements.”⁴³² This problem becomes weirdly literal when questioned not only concerning the broader category of digital objects in Hui’s understanding, but of actual 3D digital objects/images. Because as Hui further explains, digital objects often forcefully detach themselves from the supposedly original thought that conceived them and “don’t exclusively follow the paths they were supposed to.”⁴³³ Moreover, they seem to be undergoing even more changes as they “reach the hands of their users,”⁴³⁴ producing “new images and aesthetics, which reenter the cycle of images.”⁴³⁵ As Steyerl also underlines: contemporary digital ontology is a “condition partly created by humans but also only partly controlled by them, indifferent to anything but movement, energy, rhythm and complication.”⁴³⁶ It simply seems that digital objects are less and less in “our” hands.

In Atkins’ two-channel video installation *Refuse.exe* (2019), we see a group of different objects consecutively falling – bricks, chains, feathers, tires, an anchor, a cat, mirrors, a piano, fish... They pass through the first screen and continue to fall down, entering the second screen in another room, until they crash, hitting the floor, adding up to a growing pile of junk. But if we watch long enough, we notice that the initially simple looking video is never really the same. It is created with a real-time 3D simulator Unreal Engine, used for high-end development of video games. If we repeatedly explained why digital images of contemporary moving image art are usually ungraspable through representational manners, in this case we have moved onto a level where such a statement becomes redundant to argue for.

⁴²⁸ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 59.

⁴²⁹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 13.

⁴³⁰ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 100. Emphasis in the original.

⁴³¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 13.

⁴³² Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media*..., p. 165.

⁴³³ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 103.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World*..., p. 18.

Writer and game designer Gareth Damian Martin observes that *Refuse.exe* has a specific digital “materiality” to itself. In this context, he quotes an email conversation with Atkins who divulged that there is “somewhere,” out of the shot, still a fish “rotating in mid-air,” explaining that whenever they tried to take it away, “the whole thing would crash”⁴³⁷ – the seamless virtuality falling apart. This “behind the-virtual-curtain” story points to the complexity of a 3D modeled world, of which the 2D video we see on the screen is just a possible and directly changeable variation of “artificial” camera angles set in the software. But the inextricable fish holding everything together, as Martin further notes, is also expressing something about the “strange materiality” of digital objects appearing in the video, as they make slightly unrealistic movements or show deviations from physical laws of gravity – something usually understood as errors in “serious” game design. The almost “realness,” supported by real-time corresponding sounds of objects hitting the floor, is thus disrupted by objects’ behavior, deliberately set a little “wrong.” This wrongness was a direct artistic intention (as Atkins acknowledges),⁴³⁸ until there was a pixel-fish disrupting the process – an error even he was not counting on. The complexity of digital objects’ existence and the fragility of power we have over them could thus perhaps be nicely grasped in the words of one of the characters in Trecartin’s *Comma Boat*: “We are really walking a fine line – in fact, our line might be so fine that we might be seen as failing.”

Digital images are nowadays produced in the increasingly overlapping margins of what we dare to consider real, fictional, believable or possible, making us question the status of reality and the behaviors of objects we interact with. With *BCAAsystem*, a collective I am a member of, we had an interesting experience of this while presenting our fictional documentary *Azero* (2019). The video (installation) was made as a part of a larger project revolving around the former mining town of Veľký Krtíš in Southern Slovakia, and largely consisted of real “documentary,” pan shots of the actual abandoned coal mine, but smuggled realistic 3D models of remnants of an unspecified corporate complex into the landscape. The opening at local gallery was visited by many locals, some of whom were stunned, whispering confusedly, whether it actually “is there,” claiming they should soon go check how it looks.

In one interview, Cécile B. Evans talks about a similar (un)reality-(un)certainly connected to the installation of her video *What the Heart Wants* (2016), displayed at the 9th Berlin Biennale in a room flooded with approximately 35 centimeters of water resting on the surface of the floor, with the exception of a T-shaped pier in the middle. The artist describes

⁴³⁷ Gareth Damian Martin: Ed Atkins. *Refuse.exe*. *Cura*, 36, SS 2021. Accessible at WWW:

<<https://curamagazine.com/digital/ed-atkins-refuse-exe/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 17. 7. 2021]

⁴³⁸ Gareth Damian Martin: Ed Atkins. *Refuse.exe*

that because a surprising number of people stepped into the water, she couldn't help herself but ask them. As she is quoted in *The Guardian*: "I looked for people who were wet up to their knees and I'd be like, 'I'm so sorry to bother you but what can we do? Why did you do it?' And most of them said, 'Oh, I just didn't think it was real'."⁴³⁹

This example nicely shows how increasingly permeable and questionable the separation between the real and the fictional becomes for the viewers, but also how this arbitrariness is often echoed in the way artists think of digital images themselves in terms of the space "outside" of the video. Because, as we have repeatedly shown, the image is material and leaks out of any stable frame, (as if) understanding this, even works based primarily on digital moving images, when exhibited in physical galleries, often significantly shape also the surrounding space, strengthening the physical and sensual content of the video or expanding it with adjacent objects, sculptures, or other features. This is true of the works of Evans and very importantly of Steyerl, who often sculpts the space of her installations to enlarge the sensual world of the video. For *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), dealing with speculative finance through water imaginary, she created a literal wave from which the visitors watched the video (**figure 25**). Additionally, she expanded the computer grid typical in 3D modeling softwares into a black space cut with glowing blue lines swallowing the viewer into the game-like world on the projection screen in *Factory of the Sun* (2015) (**figure 26**). And Trecartin and Fitch put such emphasis on the installation (as much as their videos usually also get a one-channel cut viewable online) they call them "sculptural theatres." Such tendencies cannot be read simply as an attempt to create more immersive experience in terms of a separate fictional world but point exactly to the extreme complexity of material existence of digital media per se, as they literally enter our bodies through various types of invisible and yet very real signal waves.

This mutual co-morphing of the digital and the physical can be similarly found in the work of already mentioned Joey Holder, who creates complex installation environments exactly through the combination of 3D-modeled objects and physical materials, making spaces of grids and symbols which we usually consider flat and immaterial, and molding and bending the 3D matter as well as physical fake rocks (**figure 27**) or metal poles. Moreover, her recent project *Semelparous* (2020), revolving around eels, was literally installed in an abandoned SPA (**figure 28**). The disappearing border between actual sculpting and digital sculpting is made even more obvious by relatively recent advancements in 3D and 4D printing, technologies that literally bring into the world of physical matter even formerly

⁴³⁹ Phil Daoust: Severed ears and tear-drinking butterflies: enter the strange world of Cécile B Evans. *The Guardian*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/20/cecile-b-evans-sprung-a-leak-interview-tate-liverpool>> [published 20. 10. 2016, accessed 18.6. 2021].

digital objects originating in 3D modeling software programs – the objects now seem to be able to “free” themselves even across the physical-virtual border. The question is what they will mutate into.

Benjamin Bratton writes in his text *On Speculative Design*, that modern design was concurrent with the emergence of new materials, processes and technologies – “new matter provided for a new materialism.”⁴⁴⁰ As he further explains, today we confront materials “potentially just as transformative. From biotechnology to the internet of things to artificial intelligence and robotics to networked additive manufacturing and replication,” suggesting that “this material palette provides for the recomposition of the world at scales previously unthinkable, turning living tissue into a plastic medium and imbuing inorganic machines and landscapes with new sorts of practical intelligence.”⁴⁴¹ Connecting this approach to what was outlined here about the materiality of the digital, we can perhaps say that designing as speculative productive molding of matter, whether happening on screen or offscreen, operates within the same transmorphing fluidity, if not even, with a bit of hyperbole, within the very same matter. The idea of speculative design as performatively bringing forth something that is not (yet) possible in the “real” world,⁴⁴² as well as doing so in a process happening between and with the mutual contribution of not only human but also technical agents, has grave consequences also for the specific importance of CGI fiction, giving it strange tangibility and real-world-shaping potential. As we have already argued more theoretically, the process of producing a digital 3D model does place something in the world – it exists for its viewers online, in a gallery, or in a game. But a 3D model is potent in yet another, way more literal way: it can actually be 3D-printed. And inversely – Czech artist and a friend of mine, Matyáš Maláč, recently showed at his solo exhibition, together with his paintings, a wooden piece hung on the wall, with a small outgrowing 3D-printed object of various shapes and colors, sticking out into the space on awry enlaced wires. When I asked him about the process, he explained that the print, including the colors, was made out of a 3D scan of an actual mixture of banana and tomatoes that had been drying out for three weeks (**figure 29**). The line we walk is very fine indeed.

⁴⁴⁰ Benjamin Bratton: *On Speculative Design*...

⁴⁴¹ Benjamin Bratton: *On Speculative Design*...

⁴⁴² And in this sense, we mean not only Bratton’s perspective but partly also the one as famously expressed in *Speculative Everything Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* or the ideas of Bruce Sterling’s “design fiction.” Anthony Dunne, Fiona Raby. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge: MIT Press 2013.

3.3.3. Mythotechnesis: Operational Images and Generative Machine Fictioning

*Sometimes you build a kite and it evolves into 4Chan.*⁴⁴³

– Benjamin Bratton, On Speculative Design

“Remember your dreams before they remember you.”

– Mark Trade (2016)

“Something new was happening in the world of images, something that the theoretical tools of visual studies and art history couldn’t account for: the machines were starting to see for themselves,” writes Trevor Paglen, noting that filmmaker and media artist Harun Farocki was among the first to notice that “image-making machines and algorithms were poised to inaugurate a new visual regime.”⁴⁴⁴ A regime in which images are not “simply representing” anything, but actually “do” things in the world – causing human eyes to become “anachronistic” in wide variety of fields, “from marketing to warfare.” Farocki himself coined the term “operational images” to describe such “machine fictioning,”⁴⁴⁵ in which images are produced by machines for other machines – something irreducible to any former category of imaging.

But Paglen importantly points out that since the early 2000s, images have become “more powerful, and the means through which they’re produced have become ever darker.”⁴⁴⁶ Naming for example quality control systems in manufacturing, Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR), retail motion tracking systems in supermarkets and malls or automated pattern-recognition systems in military drones, he notes that “images are operating upon the world”⁴⁴⁷ way beyond the level captured by Farocki’s *Eye/Machine* project (2001-2003). Moreover, as he further shows, Farocki’s machinic vision as presented in the videos is not actually composed of operational images. Instead, it consists of images that have been

⁴⁴³ Quoting this without full explanation given by Bratton would be too deliberate, hence here is his footnote explanation: “Alexander Graham Bell’s space frame kite becomes Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic dome becomes Archizoom’s *No-Stop City* becomes Global Crossing’s trans-Atlantic cabling becomes scatological, populist social media.” Benjamin Bratton: On Speculative Design...

⁴⁴⁴ Trevor Paglen: Operational Images. E-flux Journal 59, 2014. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 25. 7. 2021].

⁴⁴⁵ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 7.

⁴⁴⁶ Trevor Paglen: Operational Images...

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

“configured by machines to be interpretable by humans,”⁴⁴⁸ as machines in fact don’t need “funny animated yellow arrows and green boxes in grainy video footage to calculate trajectories or recognize moving bodies and objects.”⁴⁴⁹ Such graphic marks are there only to “show humans how a machine is seeing.”⁴⁵⁰ As Yuk Hui describes in detail in *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, websites and softwares truly became more “intelligent,” understanding not only the text but very importantly, also images we upload. But that does not at all mean that we understand theirs. This leads Paglen to an unsettling conclusion, that machinic images are not only illegible to us, but “overwhelmingly invisible, even as they’re ubiquitous and sculpting physical reality in ever more dramatic ways.”⁴⁵¹ As he writes: “We’ve long known that images can kill. What’s new is that nowadays, they have their fingers on the trigger.” And as we already mentioned, this is not true only about warfare, but about almost every aspect of contemporary human life, as well as its concurrent high frequency trading-based economic system.

We could thus rephrase Spinoza’s famed aforementioned claim about the yet undiscovered potentialities of human body and conclude that we don’t know yet what a (digital) image can do. Paglen’s concern therefore is that artists should, despite being uncertain about how, urgently attempt to “plunge even further into the darkness of a world whose images remain invisible, yet control us in ever-more profound ways.”⁴⁵² Steyerl expresses a similar belief in an interview for *Rhizome*,⁴⁵³ stating that next time she will “see another 16mm film projector rattling away in a gallery,” she will “personally kidnap it and take the poor thing to a pensioners home,” adding that “today people use cellphones, Kinect sensors and After Effects to deal with the present and shape it. And if artists do not expose themselves to the workflow and economies that come with contemporary means of production, they become souvenir peddlers.”⁴⁵⁴

In her show *Power Plants* (2019) in Serpentine Galleries, she took herself up on her own word. The exhibition presented videos of blooming flowers generated by neural networks to create machine-predicted plants – AI generated flowers fast-forwarded just 0,04 seconds into the future (**figure 30**). Such speculative pre-blossoming elegantly embodies the

⁴⁴⁸ Trevor Paglen: Operational Images...

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Trevor Paglen: Operational Images...

⁴⁵³ Daniel Rourke: Artifacts: A Conversation Between hito Steyerl and Daniel Rourke. *Rhizome*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/28/artifacts/>> [published 28. 3. 2013, accessed 27. 6. 2021].

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

whole logic of speculative financial instruments, as explained in the first part of this text, exploring thereby the temporality, possibilities and mechanisms of contemporary productive machine poetics, or what we could perhaps call, following Burrows and O’Sullivan, a “mythotechnesis” – a fictioning in which “technology enters into discourse and life, through projections of the existing and future influence of machines.”⁴⁵⁵

But such machinic poetics of neural networks and machine learning is already largely co-shaping our dominant visual reality. If we don’t want to count the AI-generated “paintings” sold in past years at the auctions at Christies’s,⁴⁵⁶ or completely convincing deepfake photographs of non-existent, machine-fictioned humans (**figure 31**), animals, objects or environments,⁴⁵⁷ the so called “generative adversarial networks” (GAN),⁴⁵⁸ are used even for improving image compression, as in “up-scaling” of low-resolution 2-D textures in older video games. These processes of generative machine-imagi(ni)ng can be considered a radical example of “mythotechnesis,” as they create visual registers alien to human eyes (and we can recall the discussions about the disturbing qualities of Google Deep Dream images revealing the presets of machinic vision – **figure 32**) and eluding our understanding, but practically reshaping our visual experience and “culture,” influencing everyday human cognition and perception.

But AI can generate not only images, movements (as we have seen already in Ad Atkins’ *Refuse.exe*), but also whole narratives as those set up (as the classical art-related term “created” becomes complicated in this case) by Ian Cheng. In projects such as his *Emissaries* (2015–2017),⁴⁵⁹ he uses a video game motor to generate a landscape filled with diverse features, but doesn’t limit them to a simple task of falling and lets them evolve infinitely with

⁴⁵⁵ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Eileen Kinsella: The First AI-Generated Portrait Ever Sold at Auction Shatters Expectations, Fetching \$432,500—43 Times Its Estimate. *Artnet news*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://news.artnet.com/market/first-ever-artificial-intelligence-portrait-painting-sells-at-christies-1379902> > [published 25. 10. 2018, accessed 28. 7. 2021].

⁴⁵⁷ There are of course logical concerns about the misuse of GAN-based synthesis, as it allows to create very realistic images of either in fact non-existent people or fake actual people’s appearance in diverse audiovisual materials. This lead for example California to pass the AB-602 bill banning the use of human image synthesis technologies to make fake pornography (Accessible at WWW: <https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB602>) or AB-730, which deals with the problem in context of political campaigns.

⁴⁵⁸ “Generative modeling involves using a model to generate new examples that plausibly come from an existing distribution of samples, such as generating new photographs that are similar but specifically different from a dataset of existing photographs.” Jason Brownlee, 18 Impressive Applications of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). *Machine Learning Mastery*. Accessible at WWW: <https://machinelearningmastery.com/impressive-applications-of-generative-adversarial-networks/> [published 14. 1. 2019, accessed 13. 8. 2021].

⁴⁵⁹ *Emissary in the Squat of Gods, Emissary Forks At Perfection, Emissary Sunsets The Self*.

no human interaction, unleashing thereby a simulated world with a potentially never-ending narrative.

Moreover, AI seems to be effective also in fictioning structures speculating on the edge of the natural and the technical. Greek artist Marios Stamatis creates prints and video works with neural networks, feeding the machine learning process with images of both organic and artificial origin. As if fulfilling Hui's observation that emergence of cybernetics caused increased questioning of "the border between the natural and the artificial,"⁴⁶⁰ Stamatis's video installation *EXOEXO* (2020), brings together plant structures and technical particles to let us watch the flow of their mutation through AI (**figure 33**), fictioning yet-non-existent structures somewhere between nature and technics – Simondon's technical objects becoming natural in yet another sense. But *EXOEXO* at the same time importantly extends the AI-generated image-matter outside of the screen, letting it grow into sculptural shapes crawling around it and touching the morphing images onscreen (**figure 34**), confirming thus and adding thereby another layer to what was previously outlined about the relation between digital and physical space in contemporary moving image practice – it is a borderless "neural fluidity"⁴⁶¹ traversing our between screens, bodies and brains.

As much as we must avoid any simple claims about AI itself being "creative" in human sense (not to even mention the problematic nature of this category in human beings themselves) – wanting, for example, to become a singer as in Lawrence Lek's CGI video *Geomancer* (2017) – we must understand that a significant part of "our" visual register already is and continues to be increasingly (trans)formed by more-than-human imaging and imagining. And this imaging is not simple capturing, storing and copying. It is productive fictioning operating on scales for us hardly even imaginable. Such might also be the reason why so many artists mentioned herein question the very role of "meaning" as a functional way of addressing the world of contemporary digital flows – it is too fast and too dark to take a picture and put it into a photo album with a permanently fitting caption.

In many ways, "our" world thus often seems to elude both language-based meaning and human(-centered) cognition. And the (moving) images of contemporary art mentioned above notice this – they don't speak *about* contemporary media condition, they don't dialectically reflect on it or criticize it. Instead, knowing they have already entered it, they

⁴⁶⁰ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 54.

⁴⁶¹ As is his work described in the exhibition text of a group show *Beyond Nostalgia Hijack* (2021), Curated by Konstantinos Giotis. The exhibition text accessible at WWW:
<<https://www.can-gallery.com/22-current-show/225-beyond-nostalgia-hijack>> [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 7. 2021]

chose to step forward and “go with the flow.” Because they are aware they cannot come up with any objective image but are tired of hoping there is still a possibility of a sparkle hidden in the endless rubbing of surfaces of negation. As one of the protagonists of Centre Jenny says: “I no longer look for meaning in things. It's not my responsibility.” What Jenny, as well as other digital beings woven into this thesis, seem to be looking for instead, is perhaps best understood as a certain “feeling” – an uncertain attempt to somehow get in touch, as Brian Massumi writes, with that which “cannot be experienced” and thus “cannot but be felt.”⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*, London: Duke University Press 2002, p. 30.

4. NEW WEAPONS

But if images start pouring across screens and invading subject and object matter, the major and quite overlooked consequence is that reality now widely consists of images; or rather, of things, constellations, and processes formerly evident as images.

– Hito Steyerl, Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?

If everything flows, there must be channels.

– Michel Serres, Birth of Physics

Man no longer needs a universalizing liberation, but a mediation.

– Gilbert Simondon, On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects

“[H]ow can we be sure that what we have registered as existing really does exist?”⁴⁶³ asks Yuk Hui in his book on digital objects, bringing thus to our mind a similar query from the end of the very first chapter of this thesis. The shape of this rather fundamental philosophical question seems to have changed drastically in the contemporary ultra-mediated world of digital moving images, which, as Steven Shaviro remarks, can no longer offer us any “certificate of presence” able to attest that what “[we] see has indeed [even ever] existed.”⁴⁶⁴ And as much as “[e]very fictional narrative produces physical/material effects and affects,”⁴⁶⁵ the way in which digital fiction directly fills the “real” world with images and sounds is unprecedented.

Bernard Stiegler argues that many thinkers, Husserl among them, attempted to keep fiction out of reality by establishing “an absolute difference between perception and imagination,” which would make clear that “what is perceived is in no case imagined.”⁴⁶⁶ Perception of the “real” world in this view “must absolutely not be contaminated by the persistent fictions produced by the imagination,”⁴⁶⁷ drawing a thick line between “life-as-

⁴⁶³ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 80.

⁴⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang 1981, p. 87, 82, quoted in: Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*..., p. 16.

⁴⁶⁵ Delphi Carstens, Mer Roberts, *Things That Knowledge Cannot Eat*..., p. 223.

⁴⁶⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*..., p. 16.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

perception of the living present” and the realm of fiction or fantasy. As he concludes: “for Husserl, [life] does not tell us stories.”⁴⁶⁸

But Stiegler disagrees with such viewpoint and makes an exact opposite movement, suggesting that “lived reality is always a construct of the imagination and thus perceived only on condition of being fictional, irreducibly haunted by phantasms.”⁴⁶⁹ That means that perception and imagination are in a “transductive relationship”⁴⁷⁰ and there can be “no perception outside imagination, and vice versa.”⁴⁷¹ Consequently, as he claims, life in fact does tell stories and is not opposed to fantasy – life “is *always* cinema,” “philosophy”⁴⁷² or fiction. What he further argues is that such “intervention of the imagination at the heart of perception, is only made *obvious* by tertiary retention,”⁴⁷³ claiming that technical sounds and images made tangible something about our very consciousness which was always there (as Bergson already observed with consciousness itself being cinematic),⁴⁷⁴ only perhaps more hidden. As he strongly emphasizes, before the invention of film (and the same applies to the case of the phonograph for auditive memory) “such repetitions were strictly impossible,”⁴⁷⁵ underlining thereby that the emergence of tertiary retentions meant crucial change for the very processes through which we make sense of the world as well as of human consciousness as such.

But, as we have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis, contemporary digital media seem to bring a yet stronger conflux of perception and fiction, as digital objects and algorithms started not only to register but to alter and predict retentions, shifting the imagination itself “from subject to algorithms and digital objects.”⁴⁷⁶ They suck our memories and recordings into the whirl, shaped by artificial intelligence not just in post-production, but often already in the very moment they are being captured,⁴⁷⁷ and even directly interfere in the world and our cognition (as both a mental and a physical process) with the images and sounds not tied to any previously existing indexical reality in the first place – the stories life tells us are not history novels but fairy tales and sci-fi, piercing us with signals and waves of

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 95.

⁴⁷¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 16.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 18.

⁴⁷⁴ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. New York: The Modern Library 1944.

⁴⁷⁵ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 21.

⁴⁷⁶ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*..., p. 222.

⁴⁷⁷ Contemporary smartphone cameras function thanks to AI allowing them to calculate better focus and stabilization. Some of the brands even include smoothing filters in default settings – the most “causal” images we produce when we take a picture from a family celebration are already manipulated with artificial intelligence.

machinic fictions operating “as close to the speed of light as possible.”⁴⁷⁸ It is thus also in this very cognitive sense that we should acknowledge that humans “themselves [have increasingly] became technical individuals.”⁴⁷⁹ So if we have repeatedly spoken about fiction having the most material effect possible, it has to be understood not only in relation to the physical world or even human social structures, but on the visceral level of changes in the very structure of our own cognition and perception.

In this context, Stiegler also interestingly suggests understanding consciousness itself as an open “post-production center,”⁴⁸⁰ directing the flows of retentions while creating what he calls “protentional possibilities”⁴⁸¹ – anticipations, “including the speculative”⁴⁸² ones. This would make the very processes of human remembering understandable as kind of a “montage, a play of special effects, of slowing down, accelerating, etc.”⁴⁸³ Following this line of thought, we can see the growing importance of what Hui describes through the concept of “tertiary protention,” demonstrating it with a very simple example of a home coffee machine offering us a cup upon our arrival before we even ask for it, already presupposing we would want it.⁴⁸⁴ The tricky part is that we actually do. This protentional logic also exactly echoes Avanessian’s and Malik’s findings about the changing flow of time produced through speculative financial instruments and prehensive algorithmic processes described in the first chapter of this thesis. But if tertiary retentions of images and sounds had such influence on human consciousness, how does it react to the expanding swell of audiovisual tertiary protentions?

Such a question cannot, by its very nature, have any definitive answer, at least as of yet. But it is already clear that this human-machine co-evolution cuts deep enough for it not to be answerable on the level of a mere shift in habits. “[T]he understanding of technology is no longer a matter of a cultural critique of technology,”⁴⁸⁵ but of changing our conceptions of both knowledge and culture for them to become “adequate” to more-than-human flows carrying them further. As McKenzie Wark writes, “updating” (in her own words) Fredric

⁴⁷⁸ Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, *On Cunning Automata: Financial Acceleration at the Limits of the Dromological*. In: Robin Mackay (ed.), *Collapse VIII*. Falmouth: Urbanomic 2014, p. 465.

⁴⁷⁹ Stiegler

⁴⁸⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 28.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3..., p. 27.

⁴⁸⁴ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 240.

⁴⁸⁵ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 47.

Jameson – it is “not the cultural logic of late capitalism but the algorithmic logic of early something else.”⁴⁸⁶

It is in similar sense that Simondon has already spoken of “ontogenesis,” underlining thereby that the entangled evolution of technics and humans must be understood procesually, in terms of becoming, but also ontologically. As Brian Massumi explains, such approach to technics was not much favored still in the 1990s: “[w]hat was considered to come into being [with the advent of new technologies] was less things than new social or cultural takes on them,” applying often “models derived from linguistics and rhetoric,” keeping thus the discussion solely on the “human plane.”⁴⁸⁷ He thereby suggests a possible explanation for why Simondon’s *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* saw its English translation as late as in 2017⁴⁸⁸ – almost 60 years after it was originally published.

But it seems increasingly clear, as this thesis was also trying to show, that technological changes we experience are not explainable simply through how we decided to look at the machines, nor even how we use them to look around. What we must also acknowledge is how machines look (back) at us, and how they look at each other when we don’t watch. Burrouws and O’Sullivan therefore also turn to philosopher N. Katherine Hayles’ Simondon-influenced concept of “technogenesis” to show that “technical objects and humans modify each other’s development” on a fundamental level.⁴⁸⁹ This mutual co-evolutionary process, as they add, involves also a “looping of a number of machine and human temporalities, as well as different levels of embodied cognition such as ‘attentive focus, unconscious perceptions and non-conscious cognition’.”⁴⁹⁰

Our encounters with ubiquitous anticipatory technologies, producing the time-space of tertiary protentions, as well as with other non-representational performative fictions, thus perhaps repeatedly fail to be grasped by tools of knowledge, casting us into the dark, because they in fact elude the very time scale of “conscious registration and the (relatively slow) process of narrative comprehension in humans,”⁴⁹¹ especially compared to “the speed of Central Processing Unit in computers as well as the writing and installation of programmes

⁴⁸⁶ McKenzie Wark, *Sensoria...*, p. 193

⁴⁸⁷ Arne De Boever, Alex Murray, Jon Roffe, Ashley Woodward (eds.), *Gilbert Simondon. Being and Technology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012, p. 21.

⁴⁸⁸ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing 2017. At the time of the publication of *Gilbert Simondon. Being and Technology* (2012), they of course still refer to it as being “under way.”

⁴⁸⁹ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 438.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

and the compilation and searching of databases.”⁴⁹² But what Hayles importantly mentions is that, on the human side, apart from the temporality of conscious comprehension, there is also a “(relatively fast) firing of neurons”⁴⁹³ – a pre-conscious physical reaction to technical signals, images or sounds. It thus could be that the most vivid interaction, or rather, in Barad’s terms, “intra-action,” between humans and technics happens on a level which we are unable to see or conceptualize – in an opaque ever-shifting realm we sense but struggle to make sense of. As Steyerl has it: “Not seeing anything intelligible is the new normal.”⁴⁹⁴

So how can we even approach such intelligible intra-action? Steven Shaviro writes in *Discognition*, that “fictions and fabulations, whether articulated by human beings or by other entities, are also forms of indirect, nonphenomenological access to nonconscious forms of sentience.”⁴⁹⁵ It is also in this sense that the “feeling” we kept mentioning along the way, is something more than simply a human emotion, however it, for us, always eventually grows into one. As Shaviro explains elsewhere, “to feel something is to be affected by that something.”⁴⁹⁶ Drawing heavily upon Whitehead’s understanding of “feeling” as a positive “prehension” – a relation or contact preceding any rational or cognitive registration – Shaviro explains that feeling exists on diverse scales, “from the ‘wavelengths and vibrations’ of subatomic physics to the finest subtleties of human subjective experience,”⁴⁹⁷ and as he adds, “[e]ven mechanistic (and quantum-mechanistic) interactions are feelings.”⁴⁹⁸ As such, feeling conditions any experience, while at the same time happening before and sometimes even without us ever being aware of it. Moreover, such pre-cognitive and pre-rational intra-action, even on the most physical level, is always already “both ‘an act of perception’ and ‘an act of causation’.”⁴⁹⁹ As we have repeatedly expressed in various ways – it always somehow changes us whether we choose to acknowledge it or not.

Shaviro thus concludes, that feeling, as ungraspable, “non-functional or even dysfunctional”⁵⁰⁰ as it is, is therefore more a matter of aesthetics than any empirically based knowledge. It seems that many digital objects, as well as artists we met along the way, share this belief, albeit in a less theoretical manner, as they in specific ways resign the task of

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art*, London: Verso 2017, p. 47, quoted in: McKenzie Wark, *Sensoria...*, p. 50.

⁴⁹⁵ Steven Shaviro, *Discognition*. London: Repeater books 2016, p. 16.

⁴⁹⁶ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze and Aesthetics*. Cambridge/London: MIT 2009, p. 58. [Inside quotes come from various places in Whitehead.]

⁴⁹⁷ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria...*, p. 58.

⁴⁹⁸ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria...*, p. 62.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Steven Shaviro, *Discognition...*, p. 17

developing understanding and choose to rather address the viewer as well as to deal with contemporary digital world predominantly on such affective level. But as Shaviro underlines, again following Whitehead, the pre-conscious pre-individual affects are at the same time crucial for the formation of the very structure of what we understand as a human subject in the first place, as it actually “synthesize[s] itself out of [...] feelings.”⁵⁰¹ This is thus yet another sense in which (digital) fiction has to be understood as productive, as it becomes a vehicle for actual transformation, eluding any stable framing and flowing freely between agents involved in the digital milieu. But if the “between” is a space of such constant intra-action, recently being filled with ever increasing flood of signals and images reshaping our very subjectivity, we must beware of who fishes in its opaque waters.

Because as Bernard Stiegler notes, it is exactly through “mediums of cultural and cognitive technologies” that capitalism “rest[s] upon the control of concepts and affects,”⁵⁰² explaining that in the ultra-mediated world of “algorithmic governmentality,”⁵⁰³ we witness “exploitation of affects via calculability,”⁵⁰⁴ causing “disruption”⁵⁰⁵ in which human knowledge is “liquidate[d]”⁵⁰⁶ and automated – something we arrived at repeatedly. It is thus crucial to underline that no matter how we have advocated for autonomous agency of technical beings to be recognized, we cannot forget that despite “freeing themselves” and always eluding complete domination, technical objects are at the same time on a fundamental level still (mis)used by other human beings to their own ends – they sometimes do whatever they want, but their fictions can still benefit some and hurt others. Stiegler crucially emphasizes that just as technical objects, humans also individuate and nowadays this individuation seems to be under serious threat of being “short-circuited,”⁵⁰⁷ as the processes of human-machine development is now controlled by economic powers and subject to the constraints of “short-term profitability.”⁵⁰⁸ If, as he explains elsewhere, aesthetics, as the major realm of interaction in contemporary world, has itself become “a function of the machine,”⁵⁰⁹ it is thus crucial to what end this machine is being designed and what images it is taught to register and produce. Because as Stiegler further argues, in his typical double-edged

⁵⁰¹ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria...*, p. 14.

⁵⁰² Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World, The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic 2014, p. 40.

⁵⁰³ Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption. Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2019, p. 6.

⁵⁰⁴ Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption...*, p. 120.

⁵⁰⁵ Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption*, p. 8.

⁵⁰⁶ Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World...*, p. 33.

⁵⁰⁷ Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World...*, p. 41.

⁵⁰⁸ Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World...*, p. 83.

⁵⁰⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World...*, p. 58.

“pharmacological”⁵¹⁰ manner, “the technologies of the cultural and cognitive industries put to work in dissociated milieus as technologies of control [...] are nevertheless technologies of *spirit*,” explaining that if “properly socialized, these technologies would not be the causes of the loss of individuation, that is, forms of knowledge, but the sources of new types of individuation or new forms of knowledge.”⁵¹¹

Despite making clear certain disagreement, especially in understanding of the human “spirit,” Bratton references Stiegler’s idea of the necessary creation of long-circuits between biological and artificial organs. At the end of his essay on speculative design, he criticizes that a common approach to solving the many contemporary problems, whether technical or climatic, is for its complex imperceptible processes to be “drawn down” to the human scale, to become accessible to human “emotional comfort-zones.”⁵¹² But as we were also trying to show here, it is not a matter of rescaling the technics for the human, but of “developing a technological culture”⁵¹³ by changing the human itself as well as the traditional conceptualizations we have of the “human” as such. Developing a digital culture is therefore not a matter of drawing down, but neither simply scaling up – it is a matter of (machine co-)fictioning designs and designing fictions exceeding “human phenomenology’s intuitive scales of anatomically-embedded spatial navigation and the temporalities of organism life span.”⁵¹⁴ And as Bratton importantly adds, certain technologies, as “high-resolution scanning and sensing,” very practically allow us to “perceive properties of physical matter at a scale and precision otherwise inconceivable,”⁵¹⁵ forcing us thereby to reconsider many “metaphysical arguments about objects and ontology.”⁵¹⁶

As we have seen, defining something as a digital object, whether within or outside of art, is thus not at all simply about it being born through zeros and ones. It is instead a matter of digital ontogenesis – of becoming-digital in one part or another, of stepping into a stream and being taken by the heavy fluids, changing into something else while yet remaining aware of being a drop in the ocean. In this sense it is a slippery path that is being taken by 3D models or moving images, as well as by “real” things and bodies, a process of sucking in and productively spitting out something very physical – human, natural, floral or machinic. It is hopefully now clear that what we mean by digital images, objects or beings goes deeper

⁵¹⁰ Being possibly both a poison and a remedy.

⁵¹¹ Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World...*, p. 38.

⁵¹² Benjamin Bratton: On Speculative Design...

⁵¹³ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 58.

⁵¹⁴ Benjamin Bratton: On Speculative Design...

⁵¹⁵ Benjamin Bratton: On Speculative Design...

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

beyond any specific set of digital production tools or one category or an artistic medium. Yet the tools themselves remain crucial, in terms of who dares to explore their potential and join their forces. Moving images of contemporary art produced, for example, with the help of high-end development software such as Unreal Engine or Unity are important for this struggle, as they perform certain retooling of such software, producing fictions outside of the claws of mere profit-oriented ends, while actively exploring and “broadening and deepening,” in Simondonian sense, the space of human-machine creative communication laying at its core.

Film theorist David Rodowick answers the title of his book *What Philosophy Wants from Images*: “to renew itself conceptually through deep engagement with novel forms of aesthetic experience.”⁵¹⁷ Albeit this thesis does not agree with the places wherein he searches for them (most of them being artworks operating strongly within the logic of analogue film – a remediation or “archival” tendency Hito Steyerl criticized so indiscriminately), and maintains serious doubts about how *deep* we can actually engage with anything nowadays, the main claim still seems highly agreeable, as such images as those we have encountered here truly fill perception with something we often cannot conceptualize but which yet leaves physical “aesthetic” bite marks on our neural and cognitive capacities.

So if we live in a world increasingly structured by the logic of the “pre-” while at the same time being always “post-” something, we perhaps need to turn to what happens in “between” – a processual ontogenesis we are already part of, on the most material, physical, cognitive level. Because the protentional logic of algorithms is still being co-constituted *between* humans *and* machines, both on the level of invention and advances, and through the intra-action with human agents on the user-end. As Armen Avanessian points out: “Even if industry continues to be based on conditions of material exploitation, its central operator is *computation*, etymologically a perpetual process of calculating and thinking together (*com-putare*).”⁵¹⁸ This seems to correspond also to the way media theorist Yves Citton suggests to speak not of, so often discussed, attention economy in the contemporary digital world, but instead of “attention ecology”⁵¹⁹ – a process in which attention is not a question of individual agents, but of “attending together” which preconditions any individuation.⁵²⁰ As Wark concludes: “[t]he feelings I have of a self are cut from the flow of transindividual affect that may be the main thing media are actually for and about.”⁵²¹ Despite the need to avoid at any

⁵¹⁷ David Norman Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2017, p. 6.

⁵¹⁸ Armen Avanessian, *Miamification*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017, p. 27.

⁵¹⁹ Yves Citton, *The Ecology of Attention*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2017.

⁵²⁰ McKenzie Wark, *Sensoria...*, p. 60

⁵²¹ Ibid.

cost what Donna Haraway calls “a comic faith in technofixes,”⁵²² there thus seems to be at least some area where we can perhaps, as Deleuze has it, “look for new weapons.”⁵²³

If we return to the opening argument of this chapter, Stiegler writes that media networks and the programming industries “exploit” the above-described inherent “fictionalizing tendency” of human consciousness “by systematizing the specific resources of audiovisual technics.”⁵²⁴ Today, most fictions are intra-actions between human and technics. But it matters more how they are produced and how actively we enter this mutual process. What we thus perhaps need is a digital fiction escaping such systematization; just as Deleuze asserted that (for a body) “the way to escape judgment is to make yourself a body without organs... to define the body in its becoming, in its intensity, as the power to affect or to be affected,”⁵²⁵ we must in turn also find the digital in its becomings. The moving images mentioned in this thesis rarely help us understand, if only because they can’t claim any knowledge for themselves. But they make us feel. They help us establish contact with technical beings and their temporalities, while not being directly subordinated to individual profit-generation (acknowledging that any absolute withdrawal is illusory) or customer-gaining ends. As such, they can relatively freely mold and bend boundaries of media technical possibilities and aesthetic sensitivity, nurturing thus our ability to evolve alongside technical objects – giving the “post-production center” of human consciousness continuous updates it needs to deal with images to come. What seems to be produced in such ontogenetic mythotechnesis is thus perhaps nothing less than the “missing people”⁵²⁶ – the subjectivities to arise from human-machine fictioning.

Hui observes that digitalization created “a new sensibility”⁵²⁷ – an algorithmic, or in Shaviri’s terms, “free-floating sensibility”⁵²⁸ pulsating with alien rhythm even beneath our own skin. We are “changing into” something while something else is “growing out of [us].”⁵²⁹ But if we don’t listen enough to the machinic murmur, it might be a process leading us toward an increasing incapacity to deal with them, with ourselves, and with the world as such. As this thesis was trying to show, moving images of contemporary art, interacting through,

⁵²² Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble...*, p. 3.

⁵²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Postscript on the Societies of Control...*, p. 4.

⁵²⁴ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3...*, p. 9.

⁵²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *To Have Done With Judgment*. In: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, London: Verso 1998, p. 131.

⁵²⁶ David Burrows, Simon O’Sullivan, *Fictioning...*, p. 17.

⁵²⁷ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects...*, p. 38.

⁵²⁸ Steven Shaviri, *Post-Cinematic Affect...*, p. 2.

⁵²⁹ Ccru: A short prehistory of CCRU. Accessible at WWW: < [http://www.ccru.net/id\(entity\)/ccruhistory.htm](http://www.ccru.net/id(entity)/ccruhistory.htm) > [publication date unknown, accessed 25 4. 2018].

channeling, bringing forth or directly becoming digital object-beings, produce a rather rare experimental shared space for us to encounter and develop diverse “feelings” with and toward the (digital) world and offer thereby a platform for a much needed redefinition of our relation to technics as well as how to even understand what human subject is becoming, being ever-more-tightly ingrown into the shifting technical landscape. And as dark and fluid as this landscape might seem, we must keep trying to submerge ourselves in it intentionally and sharpen our senses toward its inaccessible depths. Because we cannot choose whether we want to float in the realm of fictioning digital objects. But if we engage it, we might still have a vote in whether they will bring preemptive blossoms or preemptive strikes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AKKER, Robin Van Den, GIBBONS, Alison, VERMEULEN, Timotheus, (eds.), *Metamodernism. Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International 2017.

ALOMBERT, Anne: Penser la forme technique de la vie : du transhumanisme à l'organologie. Accessible at WWW: https://www.academia.edu/36941531/Penser_la_forme_technique_de_la_vie_du_transhumanisme_%C3%A0_lorganologie [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 1. 2021].

ALOMBERT, Anne: Penser la forme technique de la vie: du transhumanisme à l'organologie. Accessible at WWW: https://www.academia.edu/36941531/Penser_la_forme_technique_de_la_vie_du_transhumanisme_%C3%A0_lorganologie [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 1. 2021].

AVANESSIAN, Armen, MALIK, Suhail: Introduction to The Time Complex. Postcontemporary. *DIS Magazine*. Accessible at WWW: <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/82090/introduction-to-the-time-complex-postcontemporary/> [publication date unknown, accessed 5. 4. 2019].

AVANESSIAN, Armen, MALIK, Suhail: The Time-Complex. Postcontemporary. *DIS Magazine*. Accessible at WWW: <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/82090/introduction-to-the-time-complex-postcontemporary/> [publication date unknown, accessed 5. 4. 2019].

AVANESSIAN, Armen, *Miamification*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017.

AVANESSIAN, Armen, *Overwrite: Ethics of Knowledge, Poetics of Existence*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017.

BARAD, Karen, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press 2007.

BARAD, Karen, Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Discontinuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come, *Derrida Today* 3, n. 2, 2010.

BARAD, Karen: Posthumanist Performativity: Toward An Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. Accessible at WWW: https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT4400/v14/pensumliste/barad_posthumanist-performativity.pdf [publication date unknown, accessed 23. 4. 2020].

BAUDRILLARD, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1994.

BAUMAN, Zygmunt, *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2000.

- BENNETT, Jane, *Vibrant Matter: Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press 2009.
- BERGSON, Henri, *Creative Evolution*. New York: The Modern Library 1944.
- BOEVER, Arne De, MURRAY, Alex, ROFFE, Jon, WOODWARD, Ashley (eds.), *Gilbert Simondon. Being and technology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012.
- BOLTER, Jay David, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press 1999.
- BONNET, François J., *The infra-world*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi, *The Posthuman*. Oxford – Malden: Polity Press 2013.
- BRATTON, Benjamin: On Speculative Design. *DIS*. Accessible at WWW: <<http://dismagazine.com/discussion/81971/on-speculative-design-benjamin-h-bratton/>> [published 10. 2. 2016, accessed 6. 7. 2021].
- BRIDLE, James, *New Dark Age. Technology and the End of the Future*. London: Verso 2019.
- BURROWS, David, O’SULLIVAN, Simon, *Fictioning, The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2019.
- BUTLER, Samuel, Erewhon, Dover Publications, Inc. 2002.
- CARSTENS, Delphi, ROBERTS, Mer, Things That Knowledge Cannot Eat. In: Theo Reeves-Everson, Jon K. Shaw, (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017. s. 193–234.
- CCRU, Cybergothic Hyperstition (Fast-forward to the Old ones). In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Urbanomic 2017.
- CCRU, Lemurian Time War. In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017.
- CCRU, Review of CCRU’s Digital Hyperstition. In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017.
- CCRU, Review of CCRU’s Digital Hyperstition. In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017.
- CCRU, Skin-Crawlers, In: CCRU, *CCRU Writings 1997–2003*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2017.
- CCRU: A short prehistory of CCRU. Accessible at WWW: <[http://www.ccru.net/id\(entity\)/ccruhistory.htm](http://www.ccru.net/id(entity)/ccruhistory.htm)> [publication date unknown, accessed 25 4. 2018].
- CITTON, Yves, *The Ecology of Attention*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2017.

COLEY, Rob, In Defence of 'Noir Theory': Laruelle, Deleuze, and Other Detectives. In: *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2019.

DARLING, Jesse, Post-Whatever #usermilitia. In: Omar Kholeif (ed.), *You Are Here Art After the Internet*. Manchester: Cornerhouse, London: SPACE 2014.

DELEUZE, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press 1994.

DELEUZE, Gilles, GUATTARI, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987.

DELEUZE, Gilles, GUATTARI, Félix, *What Is Philosophy?*. London: Verso 2009.

DELEUZE, Gilles, Postscript on the Societies of Control. In: *October*, vol. 59, 1992.

DELEUZE, Gilles, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Light Books 1988.

DELEUZE, Gilles, To Have Done With Judgment. In: *Essays Critical and Clinical*, London: Verso 1998.

DERRIDA, Jacques, LARUELLE, François, Controversy over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy. *La Decision Philosophique* No. 5, April 1988, pp. 62-76. Accessible at WWW: <<https://pervegalit.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/laruelle-derrida.pdf>> [uploaded 22. 2. 2005, accessed 1. 8. 2021].

DUNNE, Anthony, RABY, Fiona. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge: MIT Press 2013.

FISHER, Mark, *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction*. New York: Exmilitary Press New York 2018.

GALLOWAY, Alexander, CORREA, Manuel: The Philosophical Origins of Digitality. Accessible at WWW: <<https://tripleampersand.org/the-philosophical-origins-of-digitality/>> [published 9. 2. 2015, accessed 5. 8. 2021].

GALLOWAY, Alexander, *Laruelle: Against the Digital*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2014.

GALLOWAY, Alexander, Manuel Correa: The Philosophical Origins of Digitality. Accessible at WWW: <<https://tripleampersand.org/the-philosophical-origins-of-digitality/>> [published 9. 2. 2015, accessed 5. 8. 2021].

GALLOWAY, Alexander. In: Eugene Thacker, Daniel Colucciello Barber, Nicola Masciandaro, Alexander Galloway, *Dark Nights of the Universe*. NAME publications 2013.

HAGENER, Malte, HEDIGER, Vinzenz, STROHMAIER, Alena (Eds). *The State of Post-Cinema. Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016.

HAGENER, Malte, Where Is Cinema (Today)? The Cinema in the Age of Media Immanence. in: *Cinéma & Cie*, no. 11, 2008.

HARAWAY, Donna, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. In: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York, New York: Routledge, 1991.

HARAWAY, Donna, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, London/Durham: Duke University Press 2016.

HARAWAY, Donna, *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2008.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: The Question Concerning Technology, 1954. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil394/The%20Question%20Concerning%20Technology.pdf>> [publication date unknown, accessed 23.8. 2020].

HEIDEGGER, Martin: The Question Concerning Technology, 1954. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil394/The%20Question%20Concerning%20Technology.pdf>> [publication date unknown, accessed 23.8. 2020].

HUI, Yuk, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2016.

HUI, Yuk, What is a Digital Object?. *METAPHILOSOPHY*, Vol. 43, No. 4, July 2012, pp. 380–395.

JAMESON, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke university Press 1997.

KRAUSS, Rosalind, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson 2000.

LAND, Nick, Circuitries. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011.

LAND, Nick, Cyberspace Anarchitecture as Jungle-War. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011.

LARUELLE, François, *From Decision to Heresy. Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2012.

LARUELLE, François, On the Black Universe. In: Eugene Thacker, Daniel Colucciello Barber, Nicola Masciandaro, Alexander Galloway, *Dark Nights of the Universe*. NAME publications 2013.

LARUELLE, François, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Minneapolis: Univocal 2013.

LARUELLE, François, The Truth According To Hermes: Theorems on The Secret And Communication. In: *PARRHESIA* 9 (2010), p. 18–22.

LARUELLE, François: A New Presentation of Non-Philosophy. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.onphi.org/download/pdf/32>> [publication date unknown, accessed 8. 7. 2021].

LINDBERG, Susana, Being with Technique—Technique as being-with: The technological communities of Gilbert Simondon. *Contemporary Philosophy Review* 52, 299–310 (2019). Accesible at WWW: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-019-09466-9>> [published 8. 6. 2019, accessed 16. 7. 2021].

LINDBERG, Susana, Being with Technique—Technique as being-with: The technological communities of Gilbert Simondon. *Contemporary Philosophy Review* 52, 299–310 (2019). Accesible at WWW: < <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-019-09466-9>> [published 8. 6. 2019].

MACCORMACK, Patricia, *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*. Farnham: Ashgate 2012.

MACKAY, Robin, BRASSIER, Ray, Editor's Introduction. In: Nick Land, Robin Mackay (ed.), Ray Brassier (ed.), *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic/Sequence Press 2011.

MACKAY, Robin, Introduction: Laruelle Undivided. In: *From Decision to Heresy. Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2012.

MALIK, Suhail, The Ontology of Finance: Price, Power, and the Arkhéderivative, In: Robin MacKay (ed.): *Collapse Vol. VIII: Casino Real*. Falmouth: Urbanomic 2014.

MAOILEARCA, John Ó, *All thoughts are equal: Laruelle and nonhuman philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015.

MASSUMI, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*, London: Duke University Press 2002.

MIRZOEFF, Nicholas, *How to See the World*. London: Pelican Books 2014.

MULLARKEY, John, SMITH, Anthony Paul (eds.), *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012.

NEW MODELS PODCAST, episode 36: Happy Medium (Keller Easterlink). Accesible at WWW: < <https://soundcloud.com/newmodels/ep-36-keller-easterling>> [publication date unknown, accessed 20. 7. 2020].

NOVOTNÝ, Michal: The Emo-Romantic Turn. *Mousse Magazine*. Accesible at WWW: <http://moussemagazine.it/emo-romantic-turn-michal-novotny-2018/> [published 25. 9. 2018, accessed 16. 12. 2020].

O'SULLIVAN, Simon, Non-philosophy and Art Practice (Or Fiction as Method). In: REEVES-EVISON, Theo, SHAW, Jon K. , (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017. s. 277–324.

PAGLEN, Trevor: Operational Images. *E-flux Journal* 59, 2014. Accesible at WWW: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 25. 7. 2021].

PARIKKA, Jussi, *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015, p. Philip STEINBERG, Kimberley PETERS, Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, n. 33, 2015, pp. 247–264. Accessible at WWW:

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273895732_Wet_Ontologies_Fluid_Spaces_Giving_Depth_to_Volume_through_Oceanic_Thinking> [published 2015, accessed 26.3. 2021].

RODOWICK, David Norman, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2017.

SALISBURY, Laura, SERRES, Michel, Science, Fiction, and the Shape of Relation. In: *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 33, 2006, No. 1.

SCHMID, Anne-François, On Contemporary Objects. In: Robin Mackay (ed.), *Simulation, Exercise, Operations*. Fallmouth: Urbanomic 2015.

SCHMID, Anne-Françoise, L'épistémologie entre science et philosophie, Hal archives-ouvertes.fr, 1997. Accessible at WWW: < <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00006573/document>> [publication date unknown, accessed 3. 30. 2020].

SERKOVA, Natalya: Gallery Fiction. Towards The New Technology Of Art Dissemination. *Ofluxo*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://www.ofluxo.net/gallery-fiction-by-natalya-serkova/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 24. 7. 2021].

SERRES, Michel, *The Birth of Physics*. Manchester: Clinamen Press Limited 2000.

SHAVIRO, Steven, *Discognition*. London: Repeater books 2016.

SHAVIRO, Steven, No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism (e-book). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2015.

SHAVIRO, Steven, *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: Zero Books 2009.

SHAVIRO, Steven, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze and Aesthetics*. Cambridge/London: MIT 2009.

SHAVIRO, Steven: Unpredicting the Future. *Alienocene*. Dostupný na WWW: <<https://alienocene.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/unpredicting-to-print.pdf>> [published 31. 3. 2018; accessed 10. 3. 2021].

SHAW, Jon K, REEVES-EVISON, Theo (eds.), *Fiction as Method*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2017.

SIMONDON, Gilbert, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing 2017.

SMITH, Anthony Paul, *Laruelle, a Stranger Thought*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2016.

SPINOZA, Baruch, *Ethics*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions 2001.

SRNICEK, Nick, WILLIAMS, Alex, On Cunning Automata: Financial Acceleration at the Limits of the Dromological. In: Robin Mackay (ed.), *Collapse VIII*. Falmouth: Urbanomic 2014.

STEINBERG, Philip, PETERS, Kimberley, Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, n. 33, 2015, pp. 247–264. Accessible at WWW: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273895732_Wet_Ontologies_Fluid_Spaces_Giving_Depth_to_Volume_through_Oceanic_Thinking> [published 2015, accessed 26.3. 2021].

STENGERS, Isabelle: Reclaiming Animism. *E-flux*, n. 36, 2012. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61245/reclaiming-animism/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 6. 1. 2021].

STERLING, Bruce: Transcript of Reboot 11 speech by Bruce Sterling, 25-6-2009, *Wired*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.wired.com/2011/02/transcript-of-reboot-11-speech-by-bruce-sterling-25-6-2009/>> [published 25. 2. 2011, accessed 9. 5. 2021].

STEYERL, Hito, Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?. In: *E-flux Journal: The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg Press 2015.

STIEGLER, Bernard, *Acting Out*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009.

STIEGLER, Bernard, *Technics and Time I*. California: Stanford University Press 1998.

STIEGLER, Bernard, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011.

STIEGLER, Bernard, *The Age of Disruption. Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity pRes 2019.

STIEGLER, Bernard, *The Re-Enchantment of the World, The Value of Spirit Against Industrial Populism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic 2014.

STIEGLER, Bernard: Within the limits of capitalism, economizing means taking care. *Ars Industrialis*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://arsindustrialis.org/node/2922>> [publication date unknown.; accessed 5. 7. 2021].

THACKER, Eugene, Remote: The Forgetting of the World. In: Eugene Thacker, Daniel Colucciello Barber, Nicola Masciandaro, Alexander Galloway, *Dark Nights of the Universe*. NAME publications 2013.

VENN, Couze, Individuation, relationality, affect: rethinking the human in relation to the living. *Subjectivity* 13, 60–88 (2020). Accessible at WWW: <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-020-00091-z>> [published 10. 4. 2020].

VERBEEK, Peter-Paul, *What Things Do. Philosophical reflections on technology, agency, and design*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2005.

VERMEULEN, Timotheus: The New “Depthiness.” *E-flux Journal*, issue 61, 2015. Accessible at WWW: < <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/61/61000/the-new-depthiness/>> [published january 2015, accessed 3. 5. 2021].

WARK, McKenzie, *Sensoria: Thinkers for the Twentieth-First Century*. London: Verso 2020.

Other online sources:

AGNES, *Net Art Anthology*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://anthology.rhizome.org/agnes>> [publication date unknown, accessed 16. 4. 2021].

BEZPALOV, Vitaly, SERKOVA, Natalya: Joey Holder: ‘I hope that art can continue to question the dominant structures’. *Tzvetnik*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://tzvetnik.online/article/joey-holder-i-hope-that-art-can-continue-to-question-the-dominant-structures>> [publication date unknown, accessed 28. 7. 2021].

BROWNLEE, Jason: 18 Impressive Applications of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). *Machine Learning Mastery*. Accessible at WWW: <https://machinelearningmastery.com/impressive-applications-of-generative-adversarial-networks/> [published 14. 1. 2019, accessed 13. 8. 2021].

CHANNEL, Louisiana, Ryan Trecartin Interview: Gender is Fluid. Video accessible at WWW: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_j1lpPFmIc&ab_channel=LouisianaChannel> [uploaded 5. 6. 2018, accessed 9. 3. 2021].

Club of Opportunities informational PDF, provided by Jakub Jansa.

DAOUST, Phil: Severed ears and tear-drinking butterflies: enter the strange world of Cécile B Evans. *The Guardian*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/20/cecile-b-evans-sprung-a-leak-interview-tate-liverpool>> [published 20. 10. 2016, accessed 18.6. 2021].

FELDHAUS, Timo: Ed Atkins: “I Am Not an Authority on Who I Am.” *SSENSE*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://www.ssense.com/ko-kr/editorial/art/i-am-not-an-authority-on-who-i-am>> [publication date unknown, accessed 12. 8. 2021].

FREEMAN, Molly: 'Mockingjay' Director Refused to Use CGI to Recreate Philip Seymour Hoffman. *Screen Rant*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://screenrant.com/hunger-games-mockingjay-philip-seymour-hoffman-no-cgi/>> [published 15. 11. 2014, accessed 23. 7. 2021].

GREGORY, Jarret: Networks of Influence. *Flash Art*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://flash---art.com/article/networks-of-influence/>> [published 3. 10. 2014, accessed 11. 7. 2021].

INDRISEK, Scott: ‘It’s Exciting to Be in a Swing State’: Why Artists Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch Moved to Ohio to Build a Rural Amusement Park. *Artnet*. Accessible at WWW: < <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ryan-trecartin-lizzie-fitch-ohio-1523341>> [published 23. 4. 2019, accessed 12. 5. 2021].

KINSELLA, Eileen: The First AI-Generated Portrait Ever Sold at Auction Shatters Expectations, Fetching \$432,500—43 Times Its Estimate. *Artnet news*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://news.artnet.com/market/first-ever-artificial-intelligence-portrait-painting-sells-at-christies-1379902>> [published 25. 10. 2018, accessed 28. 7. 2021].

LHOOQ, Michelle: DC WAS MAGA BURNING MAN. Accessible at WWW: <<https://ravennewworld.substack.com/p/dc-was-maga-burning-man>> [published 8. 1. 2021, accessed 10. 1. 2021].

LOUISIANA CHANNEL, Cécile B. Evans Interview: The Virtual is Real. Accessible at WWW: <<https://vimeo.com/177369762>> [publication date unknown, accessed 13. 5. 2021].

MARTIN, Gareth Damian: Ed Atkins. Refuse.exe. *Cura*, 36, SS 2021. Accessible at WWW: <<https://curamagazine.com/digital/ed-atkins-refuse-exe/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 17. 7. 2021].

ROURKE, Daniel: Artifacts: A Conversation Between hito Steyerl and Daniel Rourke. *Rhizome*. Accessible at WWW: <<https://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/28/artifacts/>> [published 28. 3. 2013, accessed 27. 6. 2021].

The whole sheet accessible at WWW: <<http://dismagazine.com/dystopia/74959/hyperlinks-or-it-didnt-happen-cecile-b-evans/>> [publication date unknown, accessed 10. 8. 2021].

WEB OF FONDAZIONE PRADA, accessible at WWW: <<https://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/lizzie-fitch-and-ryan-trecartin/?lang=en>> [publication date unknown, accessed 6. 7. 2021].

REFERENCED ARTWORKS / EXHIBITIONS

- BCAAsystem, *Azero* (2019, digital video; video installation, Velký Krtíš)
- Cécile B. Evans, *Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* (2014, digital video / video installation, Seventeen gallery, London)
- Cécile B. Evans, *What the Heart Wants* (2016, video installation, KW Institut, 9th Berlin Biennale, cur. by DIS collective)
- Ed Atkins, *Refuse.exe* (2019, Two-channel realtime 3D simulation)
- Ed Atkins, *Ribbons* (2014 digital video, Serpentine Gallery, London)
- Harun Farocki, *Eye/Machine* project (2001-2003)
- Hito Steyerl, *Factory of the Sun* (2016, video installation, multiple gallery spaces, for example Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen 2016–2017)
- Hito Steyerl, *How Not to be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013)
- Hito Steyerl, *Liquidity Inc.* (2014, video installation, KOW Berlin)
- Hito Steyerl, *Power Plants*, (mixed-media installation, Serpentine Galleries, 2019)
- Ian Cheng, *Emissaries* (*Emissary in the Squat of Gods*, *Emissary Forks at Perfection*, *Emissary Sunsets The Self*, 2015–2017, real time simulation)
- Jakub Choma, *Gears of Life* (2020, Jindřich Chalupecký Award exhibition, Plato Ostrava)
- Jakub Jansa, *Club of Opportunities* (2017–ongoing)
- Joey Holder, *Adcredo –The Deep Belief Network* (2018 mixed media installation, Matt's Gallery, London)
- Joey Holder, *Ophiux* (2016, Wysing Arts Centre)
- Joey Holder, *Semelparous* (2020, video installation, digital print, ivy, Springhealth, London)
- Joey Holder, *The Abyssal Seeker* [Benethic Zone] (2021, Centre for Contemporary Art FUTURA)
- Lawrence Lek, *Geomancer* (2017, digital video)
- Marios Stamatis, *EXOEXO* (2020, video installation, group show Urban Antibodies, Weekend gallery, Athens)
- Matyáš Maláč, *On Dust* (2021, 3D print, steel, flax, wood)
- Ryan Trecartin, *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004, digital video)
- Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch, *Centre Jenny* (2013, digital video)
- Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch, *Comma Boat* (2013, digital video)
- Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch, *Item Falls* (2013, digital video)
- Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch, *Mark Trade* (2016, digital video)

Ryan Trecartin, Lizzie Fitch, *Whether Line* (2019, digital video / video installation
Fondazione Prada, Milan)

Referenced films:

Alita: Battle Angel (2019, dir. Robert Rodriguez)

Hunger Games: Mockingjay (2014, dir. Francis Lawrence)

APPENDIX



Figure 1 – Instagram influencers selfie posing



Figure 2 – Instagram influencer's "intimate," emotional selfie



Figure 3 – Trevor Paglen’s NSA-Tapped Undersea Cables, North Pacific Ocean (2016)



Figure 4 – Still from Trecartin’s and Fitch’s *Mark Trade* (2016), depicting a scene of floating on black water

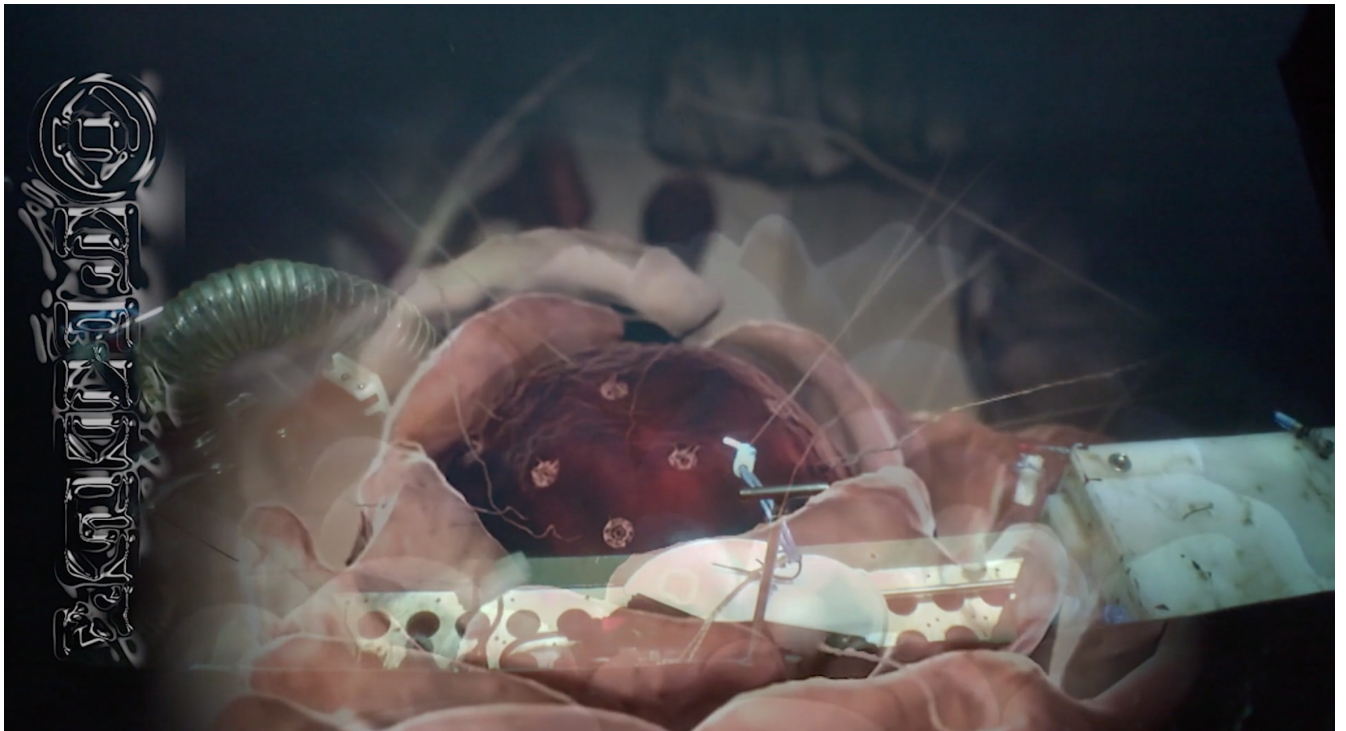


Figure 5 – Depiction of underwater genetic sequencing processes in Joey Holder's *Ophiux* (2016)



Figure 6 – Still from Hito Steyerl's *How Not to be Seen* (2013), referencing the now anachronistic meme format and aesthetics



Figure 7 – Frame from a sequence zooming in from the depicted totality of earth down to a single calibration pixel located on its surface, from *How Not to be Seen* (2013)



Figure 8 – Still from *How Not to be Seen* (2013) demonstrating the video's mingling of 3D animations, rendered architectural design plans, camera footage, et al.

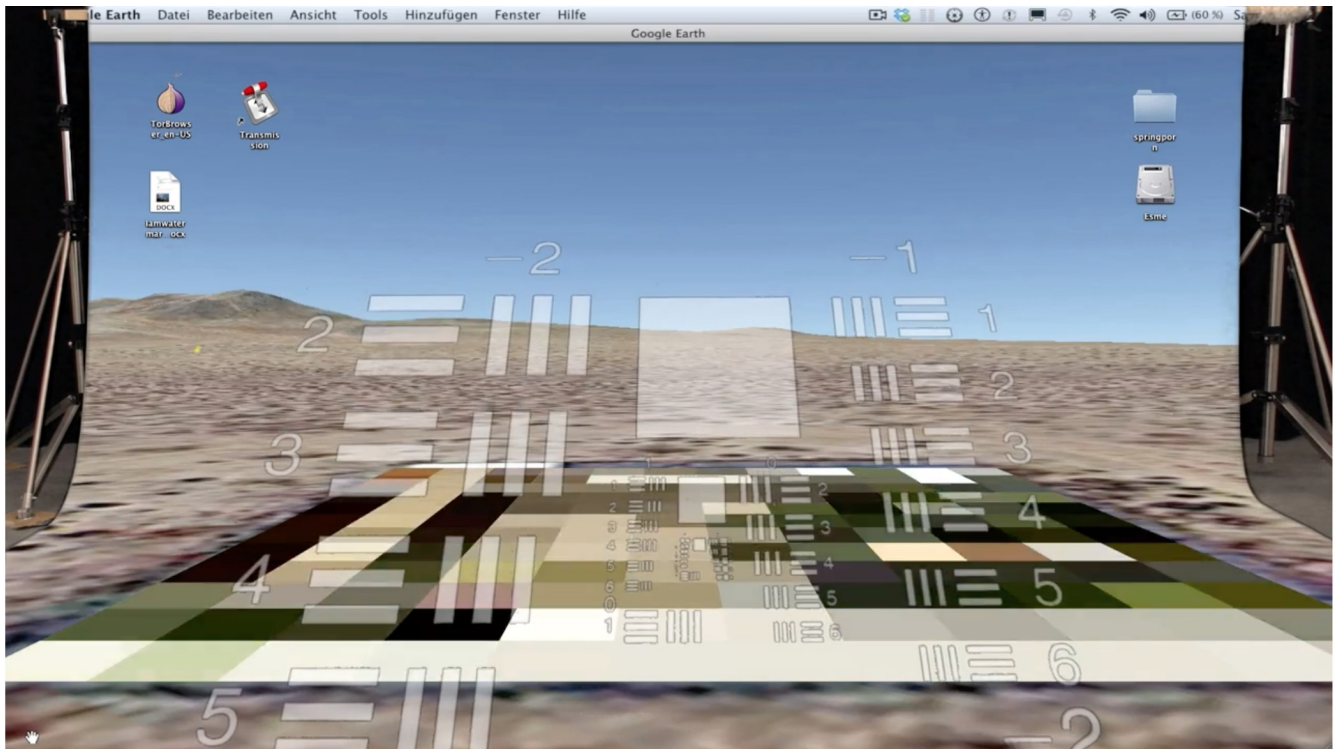


Figure 9 – A blend of digital models of resolution targets, 3D renderings of the physical (desert) space surrounding the calibration target, green screen techniques, and an Apple desktop background from *How Not to be Seen* (2016)

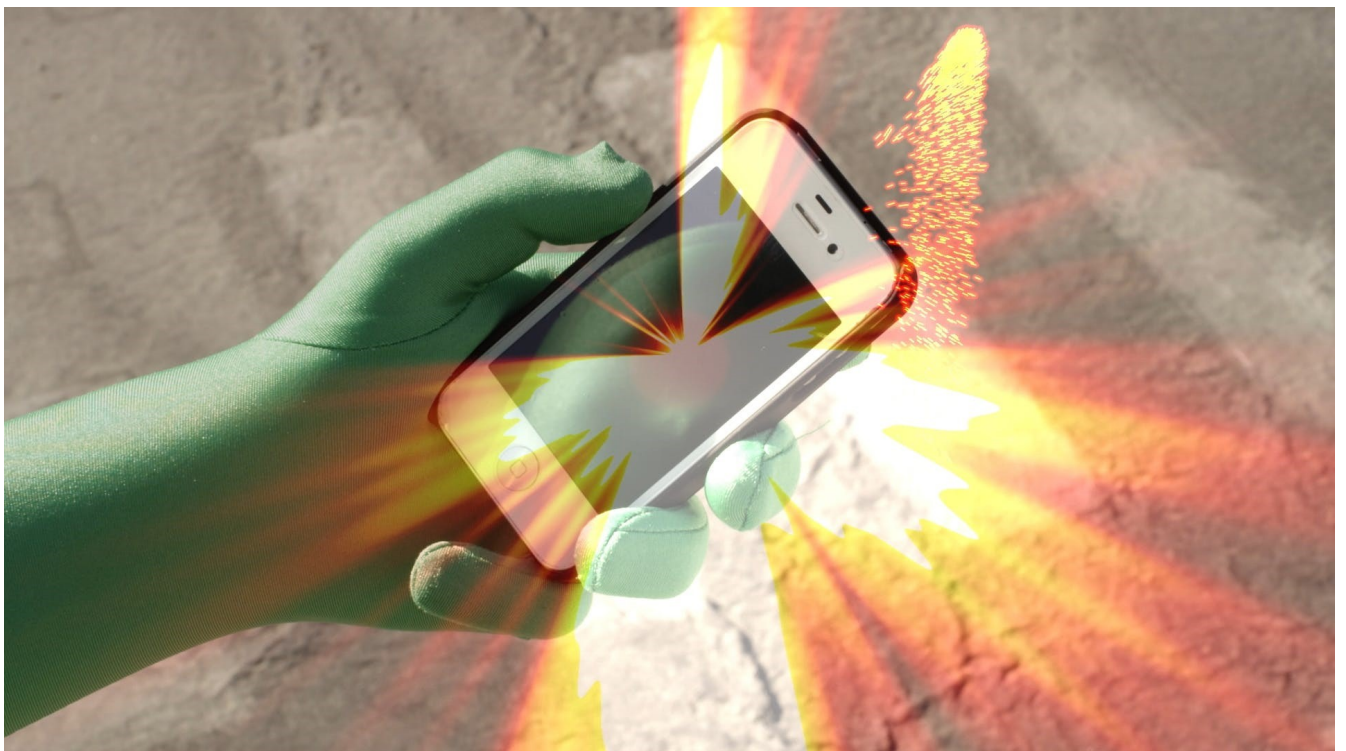


Figure 10 – Still depicting the spiraling effusion of pixels escaping from an iPhone in *How Not to be Seen* (2016)



Figure 11 – Still from the opening sequence of *Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen* (2014), showing Evan's adaptation of Lionsgate's discarded digital recreation of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman



Figure 12 – The dancing hologram of Hatsune Miku, as it appears and reappears throughout *Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen* (2014)



Figure 13 – The Invisible woman from *Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen* (2014)



Figure 14 – Still from *How Not to be Seen* (2013) in which human bodies are shown in their transformation into pixel



Figure 15 – Depiction of an “artifact” from a 3D design of an architectural visualization walking across the resolution target and into (or within) the shot from a camera, *How Not to be Seen* (2013)



Figure 16 – The rural character designated “Neighbor girl” who plays a role in Ryan Trecartin’s project *Whether Line* (2019)



Figure 17 – Trecartin’s actual living space, which doubles as a virtual home for his characters



Figure 18 – The juxtaposition of two slightly varied camera angles in Mark Trade (2016)



Figure 19 – A demonstration of another of Trecartin's layering techniques, in which two scenes or frames are visually merged (from *Center Jenny*, 2013)



Figure 20 – Still from *Center Jenny* (2013) showing the jarring placement of non-utilized green screens as elements of the film set



Figure 21 – Here holographic Miku reappears in *Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen* (2014), merging screens and animations with shots and overlays

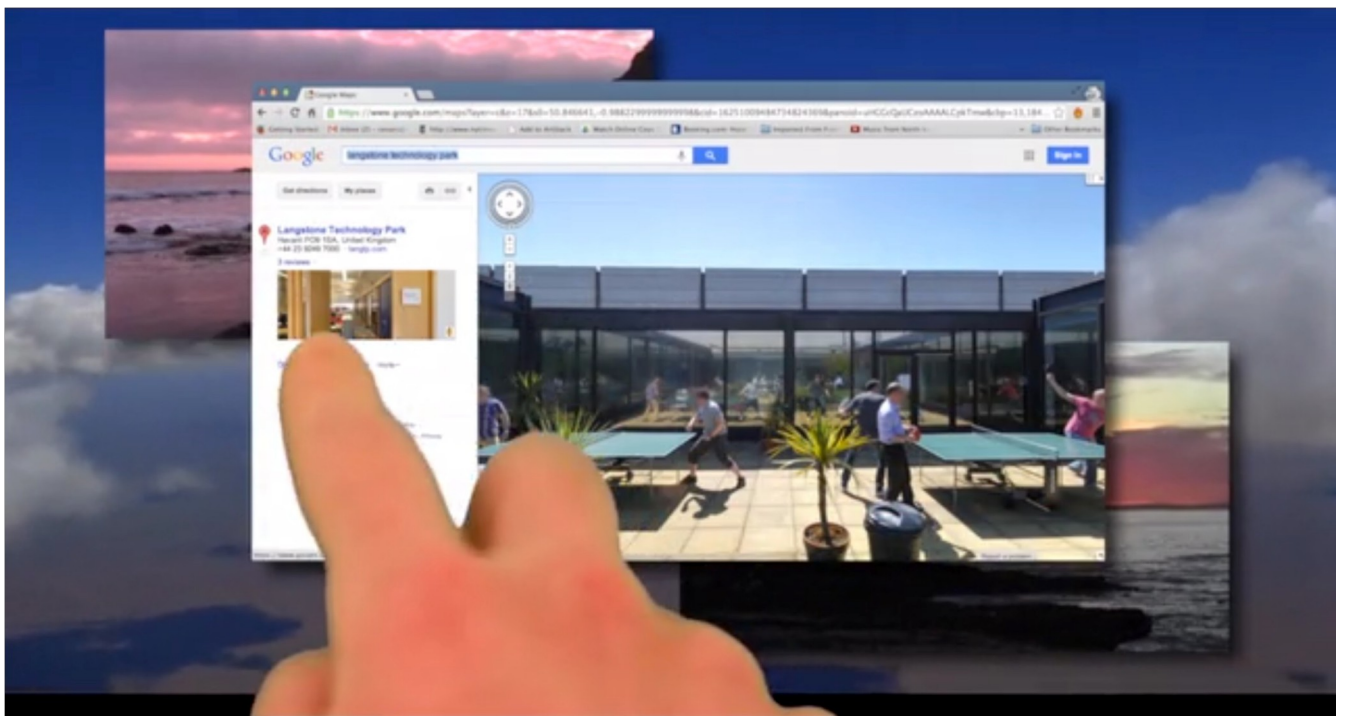


Figure 22 – The interplay of camera shots, desktop backgrounds, images, and animation in *Hyperlinks or It didn't Happen* (2014)



Figure 23 – The complex morphing and interaction between images and scenes in Item Falls (2013)



Figure 24 – A photograph of Ed Atkins' installation Ribbons (2014), featuring the mutating figure



Figure 25 – The wave of the viewing platform, from which people watch the video element of Liquidity Inc. (2014), Steyerl’s watery depiction of speculative finance

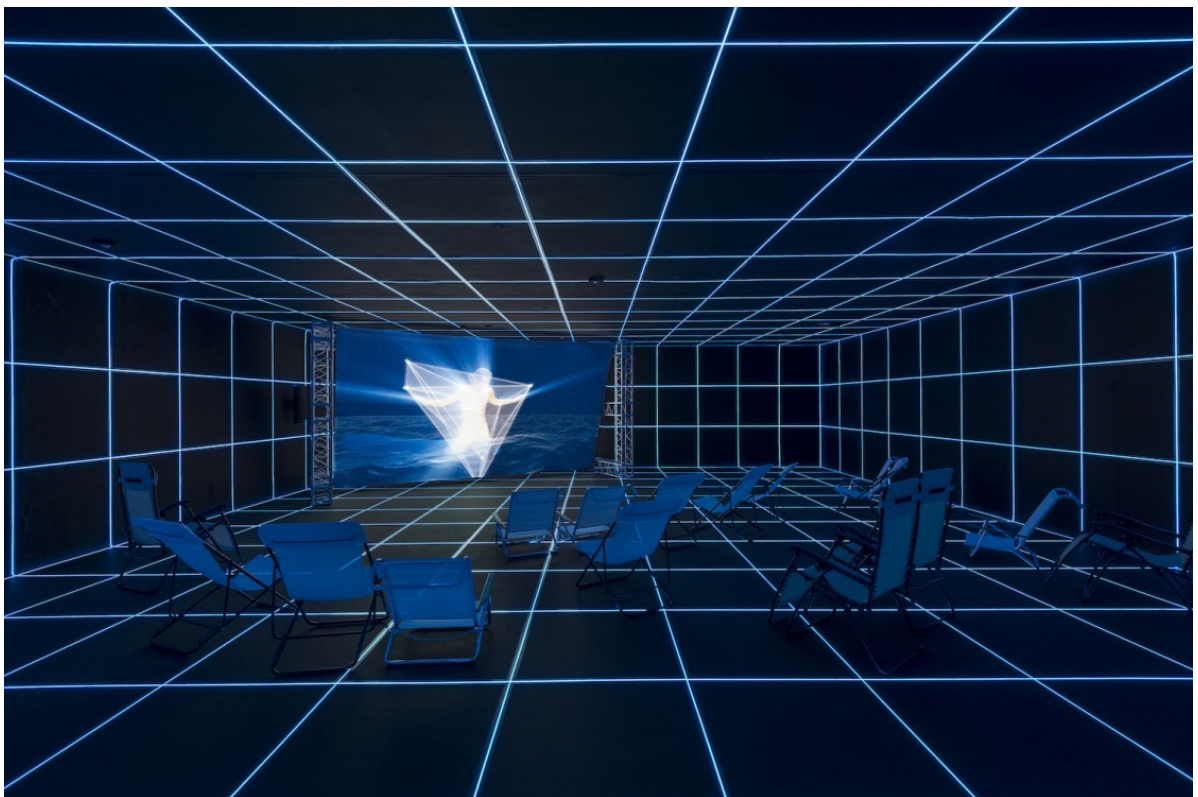


Figure 26 – The physical installation space for Steyerl’s Factory of the Sun (2015), designed to engulf viewers in a 3D modeling software’s blank space



Figure 27 – Holder’s intricately fabricated installation environment for *Adcredo – The Deep Belief Network* (2018), which integrates physical fake rock and virtual designs



Figure 28 – Joey Holder’s *Semelparous* (2020), installed in an abandoned spa



Figure 29 – Matyáš Maláč, *On Dust*, (3D print, steel, flax, wood, 2021), 3D printed scan of rotten fruit, from his recent exhibition *Love Your Data –The Life of a Paranormie*



Figure 30 – Hito Steyerl's *Power Plants* (2019) installation, comprising of videos showing the bloom of flowers as rendered by machine learning



Figure 31 – StyleGAN’s generation of a non-existent person, processed by portrait analysis

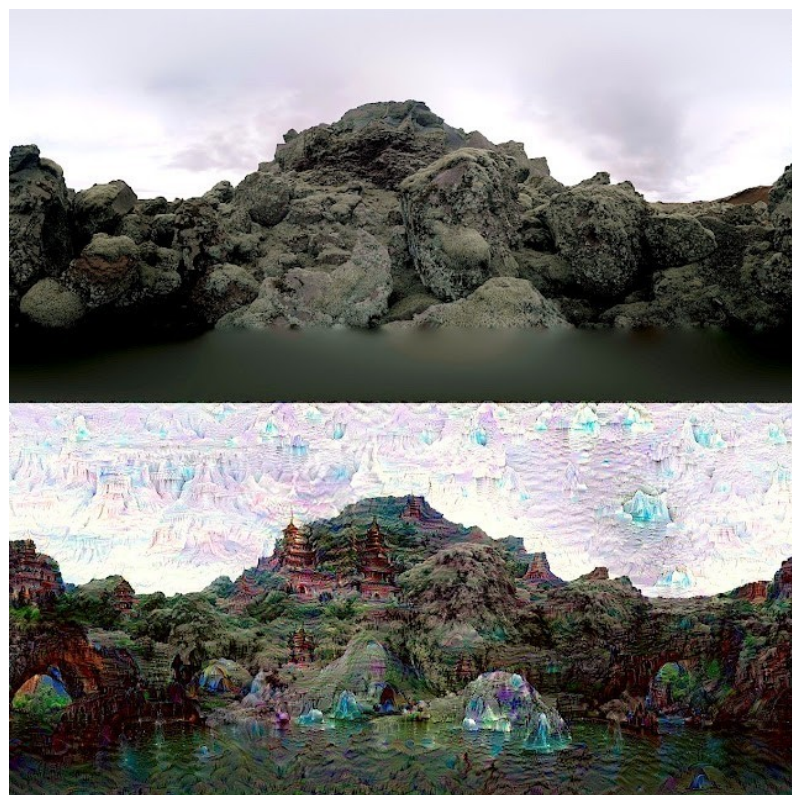


Figure 32 – Landscape image generated by Google Deep Dream, showing presets of machinic vision



Figure 33 – Still from Marios Stamatis' *EXOEXO* (2020) installation, which shows the flowing mutations of plant structures and technical objects



Figure 34 – A photo from *EXOEXO* (2020), showing the extension of the AI-generated image-matter into the gallery physical space

